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THE APPLETON BOOK
OF SHORT PLAYS

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

ACTABLE SHORT PLAYS FOR AMATEURS

EDITED BY

KENYON NICHOLSON

INSTRUCTOR IN DRAMATIC COMPOSITION, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

AUTHOR OF "A STUDY OF THE MODERN DRAMA," ETC.



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK & LONDON & MCMXXVIII

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INTRODUCTION

The Appleton Book of Short Plays is a convenient collection of modern American one-act plays for the use of amateurs in churches, clubs, schools, and the home circle.

The excellence of the work in this volume is one of several indications of the fact that the amateur has made an important place for himself in our national life. No editor of thirty years ago could have found a dozen one-act plays written by native dramatists that measured up to the standard of the plays in this book. Dramatists in those days were not writing them and if, by chance, a man like Herne or Howells had set his mind to it and turned out a really first-rate one-act play, there were precious few amateurs who would have known what to do with it. A collection of even the best plays of a generation ago would offer a most amusing contrast to the plays in *The Appleton Book of Short Plays*; it would be of antiquarian interest to students only, or to those Little Theater groups that are to-day reviving old-timers like "Fashion" or "The Streets of New York."

The amateur of to-day usually demands plays of genuine merit. He is interested in plays because he likes to see them and act in them, he is attracted to his local amateur theater because he demands the sort of spiritual fare it has to offer him. His activities are an end in themselves.

The selection of plays in this volume is based upon a sense of the theater. It presents, at the same time, an interesting and logical unity apart from any considerations of actability. These twelve one-act plays are, in a way, a tabloid exhibit of achievement, a miniature panorama of the life of this country from the Revolution to the present day, as seen through one particular form of art. Whether the editor was altogether

INTRODUCTION

conscious of this, I cannot say; perhaps his instinct as a dramatist had something to do with it. I don't mean that this little collection is an academic history book, but I do see in it something more than a group of short plays carefully selected for amateur players.

There is Percy MacKaye's "George Washington at the Delaware," an act arranged by Mr. MacKaye himself from his impressive ballad play, "Washington, the Man Who Made Us." In Miss Hoffman's comedy, "The Wedding Dress," the scene of which is laid in Philadelphia during the early years of the last century, there is one character who served under the Father of His Country. Mr. Lincoln's play, "The Managers," is not a "period" play, but is it not permitted to regard almost any play of rural New England life as belonging to no particular epoch? The characters here might just as well—with only the slightest modification of language—have been set against a late eighteenth or early nineteenth century background. The rest of the plays, except the purely fantastic "Pierrot's Mother," are concerned with native scenes and character. Mr. Hughes' piece is not exclusively American, but, while Pierrot is French, may not the author justly claim to have invented his mother?

"Finders-Keepers" seems to me an extraordinarily fine bit of character work, and a biting satire on contemporary life. Mr. Kelly is one of our most highly gifted dramatists, and one of the few who understand art art of writing a play from the inside out, rather than according to the time-honored custom of doing it the other way. "The End of the Trail" is characteristic of certain recent tendencies in our theater. The desire to dig deep into the tragedy of life is firmly rooted in several of the younger playwrights, and it seems to me that Mr. Culbertson has succeeded admirably in squeezing every drop of drama out of his situation. "Society Notes" and "Apartments To Let" are amusing comedies, and a little more—they are based on ideas; "The Ghost Story" is good fun, and "One Egg" an especially happy example of pure farce, handled with considerable skill. "Social Balance" introduces one of those basically serious ideas that underlie most good

INTRODUCTION

comedies. Finally, I like to think that the editor added "When the Clock Strikes" by way of dramatic effect: I have, he seems to say, offered you eleven varieties of one-act play, all of them well-done in their way, but here is a burlesque, in order that you may not take this exhibition too seriously. For the theater after all is to be thoroughly enjoyed only when you give yourselves up to it without afterthought. Here, then, is a comic interlude—a sort of satyr-play such as the ancient Greeks used to add to their heavy trilogies. Only Mr. Nicholson is too much a man of the theater to say that: it is my business to say it for him. Just as it is my business to add what few practicing dramatists would dare to admit, even if they thought it: a good acting play is usually just as good to read as to see in a theater. It is not necessary to drag in the name of Thomas Hardy, who is only a novelist, in order to prove this, but he did say something very suggestive, which I shall quote. "Some critics," he writes, "have averred that to declare a drama as being not for the stage is to make an announcement whose subject and predicate cancel each other. The question seems to me to be an unimportant matter of terminology. . . . By dispensing with the theater altogether, a freedom of treatment was attainable in this form [he refers to his own play "The Dynasts"] that was denied where the material possibilities of stagery had to be rigorously remembered. . . . Whether mental performance alone may not eventually be the fate of all drama, other than that of contemporary or frivolous life, is a kindred question not without interest."

The author of *Tess* does not, naturally, mean that a play like "One Egg" or "The Ghost Story" can be performed mentally and produce its effect as surely as it can when it is performed in a theater: but it is no less true that almost any play that goes well on the material stage, goes equally well on the mental stage. I have seen three or four of the plays in this book performed, and though they were creditably acted and well staged, I enjoy them quite as fully in the reading. I have therefore thought it worth my while, in this little speech before the curtain, to put in a word directed at

INTRODUCTION

those who cannot join the local Little Theater, or (if such there be) who are not affiliated with one of the innumerable dramatic societies that cover our country. Plays are written, we are told, to be acted, but if they give pleasure between the covers of a book, why should they not be read?

BARRETT H. CLARK.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	V
THE MANAGERS, by Joseph C. Lincoln	I
A comedy of Cape Cod.	
FINDERS-KEEPERS, by George Kelly	35
A modern realistic comedy.	
APARTMENTS TO LET, by Elliott Nugent and Howard Lindsay	77
A comedy of modern life.	
ONE EGG, by Babette Hughes	109
A farce.	
THE END OF THE TRAIL, by Ernest Howard Culbertson	135
A Modern realistic drama.	
GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE, by Percy MacKaye	163
An historical play.	
SOCIETY NOTES, by Duffy West	183
A comedy of manners.	
SOCIAL BALANCE, by Samuel Fayder	217
A comedy of bad manners.	
THE WEDDING DRESS, by Phoebe Hoffman	251
A costume play of Colonial days.	
WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES, by John Parrish	285
A burlesque.	

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PIERROT'S MOTHER, by Glenn Hughes	305
A fantastic play.	
THE GHOST STORY, by Booth Tarkington	331
A comedy for persons of no great age.	

THE MANAGERS

A COMEDY OF CAPE COD

by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

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THE MANAGERS

The only problem in the staging of "The Managers" that is likely to arise is the creation of authentic Cape Cod local color. If you live in a community where Boston rockers and whale's teeth are scarce, be not perturbed, for the play may be produced just as successfully without these atmospheric touches. The comedy is primarily a study of two old cronies, who, though they are really very congenial, squabble and quarrel in their efforts to "manage" each other. These two delightful old men are not peculiar to any particular locality; Lady Gregory has given us a similar pair in "The Workhouse Ward." The comedy effect of the play will be enhanced if the players who act Hiram and Timothy are physically as nearly alike as possible.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR TIMOTHY TIDDITT

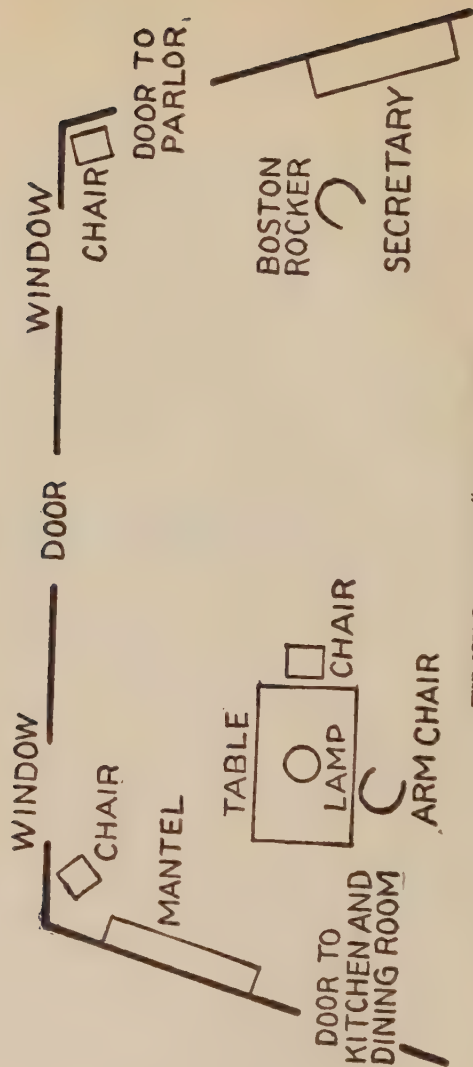
Newspaper

Pipe

Tobacco pouch

FOR GERTRUDE SALTERS

Market packages



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "THE MANAGERS"

Note: In this diagram "left" and "right" are from the viewpoint of the audience.

THE MANAGERS

CHARACTERS

HIRAM SALTERS, *bachelor, brother of Gertrude's father
(about 65 years of age)*

TIMOTHY TIDDITT, *bachelor, brother of Gertrude's mother
(about the same age as Hiram)*

GERTRUDE SALTERS, *their niece (age 20)*

SCENE: *Sitting Room of the Salters-Tidditt House in a Cape
Cod Village*

TIME: *The Present*

The room is furnished, for the most part, in old mahogany or cherry, heirlooms in the Salters or Tidditt families. The wallpaper is of a bright, old-fashioned flowered pattern. There is a door at the back, center, with a window at each side. The windows are hung with chintz curtains—GERTIE has seen to that. This door is open, for it is early afternoon of a bright August day, and through it, and beneath the window shades, may be seen glimpses of the roofs and steeples of the village, with a background of blue sea and sky. There is another door on the left, which leads to the dining room and kitchen. There is still another on the right which leads to the parlor, but this is not used during the action of the play, nor—except at rare intervals—at any other time. The pictures on the walls are, with two exceptions, engravings or chromos of the mid-Victorian period. These exceptions are oil paintings of schooners, one the "Flyaway, Hiram Salters, Master"; the other the "Swift Wind, Timothy Tidditt, Master." The floor is covered with hooked and braided rugs. There is a mantel with an old-fashioned clock, a pair of whale's teeth, a photograph or two, and a vase with summer flowers upon

it. A table, covered with a bright cloth, stands just at the left and forward of the center of the stage. There is a lamp, a magazine, and a workbasket on the table. Beside the table is an old-fashioned armchair. At the wall, right, is an antique secretary with glass doors. A large "Boston" rocking-chair is near it. There are two other and smaller chairs in the room, also a small sofa, and a flower stand with a potted plant upon it, near the window.

When the curtain rises TIMOTHY TIDDITT is seated in the Boston rocker reading the local weekly paper. He is a sturdy, sunburned man, gray-haired and chin-bearded. He wears spectacles pushed well forward on his nose. His dress is the "everyday" garb of a respectable citizen who cares for comfort rather than appearance. HIRAM SALTERS is standing by the secretary, one door of which he has opened, and he is rummaging amid the articles on its shelves. He is of a similar build to TIDDITT, but his beard is not as long nor as full. Both look what they are, retired skippers of fishing schooners, men used to command and fond of having their own way. They are a little selfish, as most elderly people are likely to be, but, although they squabble continually, they are very fond of each other and they idolize their niece, who lived with them from the time she was a child until she went to Boston to take a position with a business house. Now she is at home on her annual vacation, a fact which the unusual neatness of the room makes quite evident.

HIRAM (*turning*)

Say, Tim, do you know where my new pipe is?

TIM (*still reading his paper*)

Eh?—What?—No, of course I don't. Don't you know where you put it?

HIRAM

Course I know where *I* put it. What I want to know is where somebody else put it. Consarn it! Why *don't* Gertie let things alone?

THE MANAGERS

TIM

Well, you know her. She believes in having a place for everything. When a thing's in its place, she says, you can always find it.

HIRAM

Humph! You can if you can find the place. (*Still rum-maging.*) When you and I are alone here, running this shanty, we know where to hunt for things we want. If they ain't in one trash heap, they are in another. But soon as that girl comes down from Boston on her month's vacation she commences to do what she calls put this place in order. Then you can't find *nothing*. Gertie is the finest girl there is on this earth—

TIM (*interrupting*)

I can lick any man that says she ain't.

HIRAM

Yes, she is, and we're proud of her. But ain't it funny how women get the notion that they can manage things? A ship is the hardest thing to manage in this world, and you don't find the women cap'ning ships, do you?

TIM (*chuckling*)

You sartin don't! But women are all alike that way; and they stick up for each other, too. That Huldry Simmons, that leaves our shirts out in a heavy dew and calls it washing 'em, she had the nerve to tell me that Gertie wound you and me 'round her finger. Managed us, she said, as if we was a couple of kids. What do you think of that!

HIRAM

The devil she did! What did you say to her when she hove that out?

TIM

I didn't *say* nothin'. I just looked at her and grinned, same as I'd look at a dime show freak.

HIRAM

I guess that settled her, didn't it?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

TIM

I'd say it did! She shriveled up like one of them sensation plants.

HIRAM (*scornfully*)

Gertie—that child—managing a couple of old-time fishing skippers like you and me! Ho ho! That's a good 'un. . . . Blast the pipe! I ain't going to waste more time hunting for it. I smoke too much anyhow. I'm going to swear off. . . . Lend me yours, will you?

(TIM *hands him pipe*. HIRAM *comes forward and sits in armchair*. TIM, *reading his paper once more, chuckles*.)

TIM

There's something in the paper right along the lines we've been talking about. The piece is about "Happy Homes" and it says that a reg'lar happy household don't have but one boss in it.

HIRAM (*complacently*)

Well, I guess that's about so.

TIM (*just as complacently*)

Um-hm. Sure it's so! Look how you and me have always got along keeping bachelor's hall together. No fights; no disagreeing; calm weather all the time—just the way that paper fellow says.

HIRAM (*smiling to himself*)

Just that way. (*Suddenly suspicious*.) Say, hold on there! What are you looking so sly about? You don't cal'late that you're the "one boss" of *this* shebang, do you?

TIM (*serenely*)

Well, I don't know as I'd call myself just that! But I notice I generally manage to get what I want.

HIRAM

Is that so? Well, I want you to understand, Tim Tidditt, that if things have gone right in this house, it's because *I've* seen to it that they did. I don't make any fuss, but I make out to get my way.

THE MANAGERS

TIM (*putting down his paper and speaking sarcastically*)

Dear me! I want to know! Suppose we try to fetch up a little instance of that. You know where Gertie is now, don't you?

HIRAM

Sartin! She's gone down to the village to buy the corned beef and cabbage we're going to have for supper to-night. She was thinking of buying a chicken to make a pie out of, but I stopped that. Says I, "Chicken pie is all right, Gertie, but it happens to be my day to choose and *I* choose a b'iled dinner!" She was kind of sot at fust, tried to make out that cabbage always gave me dyspepsy, but I talked and—we're going to have the b'iled dinner! Now *that's* managing!

TIM

Humph! Hiram Salters, you set up straight like a good boy and listen while I give you a lesson. *I* see Gertie after you did, and supper to-night ain't going to be b'iled dinner. It's going to be what *I* want, which is salt fish and potatoes. . . . And maybe *that's* managing too!

HIRAM (*excited*)

I bet you a dollar it's corned beef!

TIM (*just as excited*)

I bet you a dollar it's fish and potatoes!

HIRAM (*impatiently*)

Tim Tidditt, I think more of you than I do of any man living, but when you get one of your fool notions! . . . Oh! (*in huge disgust*) if I didn't make it a point never to lose my temper, I'd—

TIM (*interrupting*)

Hiram Salters, you're a mighty fine fellow but you have crazy streaks. If I wasn't always peaceable and never got mad, I'd—

HIRAM

Bah!

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

TIM

Bah yourself!

HIRAM

That dollar bet goes; understand?

TIM

You bet it goes!

(They glare at each other and slowly cool down.)

HIRAM

Oh well! All right! . . . Humph! . . . Now I don't suppose likely you know where my tobacco is, do you?

TIM

No, 'course I don't. Why don't you take care of your tobacco? How should I know where it is?

HIRAM

Well, I didn't know but you might. You borrowed it half an hour ago.

(TIM finds tobacco in pocket and gives it to him.)

HIRAM

Tim, there's something I've been wanting to say to you—something about Gertie. She'll be back any minute now—with the corned beef—

TIM

Eh? . . . With the salt fish, you mean.

HIRAM

Sshh! She'll be *back* anyhow. And afore she comes back there's something I want to talk to you about. It's been on my mind for quite a spell, and since she's been here this time on her vacation from that Boston office, it's been there more than ever. If you and me don't look out that girl is liable to marry somebody—and it *might* not be the right somebody.

TIM *(startled)*

Sho! So that's been on *your* mind, too, Hiram, has it? Humph!

THE MANAGERS

HIRAM

Too? Do you mean *you've* been thinking about it?

TIM

Sartin. I haven't thought of much else for quite a spell. Of course it's all right for her to get married. Women seem to *want* to get married, for some crazy reason or other.

HIRAM

So's they can have a man to manage for 'em, I presume likely.

TIM

Probably that's it. And Gertie's a fine looking, capable girl, and it's natural, I suppose, that she should have young fellows hanging around. You know last summer when she was down and that young what's-his-name—Randall Holt—was here on *his* vacation, I was just a little mite afraid. . . .

HIRAM

So was I. Good, nice-enough boy he was, too, in a way; and if he'd lived here in town, instead of up to Boston, I shouldn't have minded so much his chasing Gertie. That is, I shouldn't till I found out what he did for a living.

TIM

I know. Gertie told me he was a painter. Well, painting's a good job, and house painters get nine or ten dollars a day. But when she said he didn't paint houses, but just pictures of boats and trees and—and cows!—them kind of chromos you used to get with a pound of tea! That was enough for *me*!

HIRAM

Me, too! Godfreys!

TIM

I guess *so*! And she was trying to tell me that he got as much as a hundred dollars for one of them cow pictures. Ho, ho!

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

HIRAM

Ho, ho! A hundred dollars for the *picture* of a cow! I could buy the *cow* herself for less than that.

TIM

Well, anyhow, he's out of it. When I was up street last night, George Willis told me he met a Boston fellow that knows Holt, and Randall had told this fellow he was engaged to be married.

HIRAM

Sho! Who to?

TIM

He didn't say. Some girl up there, I suppose. And that settles *him* of course. But, if it didn't, we can't have her marrying away from here. We've got to fix it so she marries a man that lives in this town. It's bad enough having her up in Boston working. If she was *married* there, we'd *never* see her.

HIRAM

You're right. That's just what I've been thinking, and so, says I to myself, "This is the time for a man of experience, one with a head on him, to do some managing" . . . and I've been doing it.

TIM (*wheeling in his chair to look at him, suspicion in his voice*)

O-oh! Oh, I see! *You've* been trying to manage, have you?

HIRAM (*complacently*)

I have. . . . Tim, I don't know whether you've noticed it or not, but there's been a nice young fellow calling at the house considerable this past week. *Have* you noticed it?

TIM

Yes, I've noticed it. As a matter of fact, 'twas me that put him up to coming.

HIRAM

You! Me, you mean.

THE MANAGERS

TIM

No, I mean me. I got ahold of him down to the post office the first night after Gertie got home and I put a flea in his ear. I says to him, "Boy," I says, "you're a smart, lively fellow, the kind the girls like. You're earning good wages carpentering—"

HIRAM (*breaking in*)

Carpentering! He ain't a carpenter, he's a telegraph operator.

TIM

Who is?

HIRAM

Why, the young fellow that comes here to see Gertie. The one I told to come.

TIM

You're crazy again. Do you mean to tell me that Sam Doane ain't a carpenter?

HIRAM (*as the light dawns upon him*)

Sam Doane? *Sam Doane!* Tim Tidditt, do you have the face to set there and tell me *that's* why that bow-legged, freckle-faced—*He* don't think he's coming here to get our Gertie, does he?

TIM

Course he thinks so. Didn't I tell him to come? Wasn't he here night afore last? Who did you think I thought was coming?

HIRAM

Why, the fellow that was here *last* night, of course. The smart, up-to-date, handsome chap that—

TIM (*breaking in and springing to his feet*)

Good heavens above! You don't mean that lopsided, gangle-shanked, monkey-faced Ed Larrabee? You *can't* mean him, Hiram? *Don't* tell me *he* thinks he's got a chance for Gertie? Oh, dear! Let me laugh! Ho, ho!

HIRAM

Laugh, then! Why don't you look in the lookin'-glass so's you'll see something ridiculous to laugh at? Look here, Tim Tidditt, I know what I'm doing. I picked Ed Larabee out myself, from all the young men in this town. You and your Sam Doane can keep right out of this.

TIM

Hiram! *Don't* make me ashamed of you! What do *you* know about such things? You never was married. *You* never had a husband.

HIRAM

Haw, haw! Never had a husband! That's a good 'un. No, you're right. I never did.

TIM (*significantly*)

Well, lots of other old women have.

HIRAM

Say, who are you calling an old woman? *You* never even had a *wife*.

TIM

I could have had a dozen if I'd wanted 'em. There's been plenty of women running after me in my time. But (*chuckling*) they never caught me.

HIRAM

Humph! Most of 'em was too old and crippled to catch up with anything but the hearse.

TIM

Say, that's enough of that. Now you listen to reason. Sam Doane is my choice to marry Gertie. I'm managing this business, and it's as good as settled right now. Why, Sam's even got the ring he's going to give her.

HIRAM

The ring?

THE MANAGERS

TIM

Sartin. A solid gold ring that belonged to his grandfather. It's got a carbuncle in it as big as the end of my finger.

HIRAM

A carbuncle! Say! I had a carbuncle on the back of my neck once, and it wasn't any engagement present, I tell you! Carbuncle! Ho, ho! . . . Now let me tell *you* something. Ed Larrabee has got a present for Gertie—and there ain't any carbuncles on it neither. It's a watch—a watch that belonged to his Aunt Hettie. It's eighteen carats.

TIM (*laughing derisively*)

Don't say any more! I've seen that watch and it ain't any bunch of carats—it's a turnip.

HIRAM

Ed Larrabee is going to marry Gertie. . . . I warn you, Tim Tidditt.

TIM

Hiram Salters, I'm breaking it to you just as gentle as I can; she's going to marry Sam Doane.

HIRAM

We'll see who's the "one boss" here!

TIM

You bet we will!

(*GERTIE is heard outside.*)

GERTIE (*at the door, calling*)

Good-by. Thanks for helping me with the bundles.

(*HIRAM and TIM exchange glances of defiance and rise as she enters. She has her arms full of grocery and market packages. She is a pretty and attractive young woman.*)

GERTIE (*beaming upon them*)

Well, here you are. Just as happy and contented as two bugs in a rug, aren't you. I tell everybody that I don't believe there ever were two people who got along as well together as my uncles do. I am proud of you.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

(She kisses first HIRAM and then TIM. They are too much excited by their recent argument to answer her. She moves toward the kitchen door.)

GERTIE

Now I must put the things in the kitchen.

HIRAM

Who was it you was hollering good-by to, Gertie?

GERTIE

Oh, it was Sam Doane. I met him down to the corner and he helped me bring my packages home.

HIRAM *(angrily)*

Sam Doane! What in thunder? . . . Humph!

TIM *(winking triumphantly at HIRAM)*

Oh, it was Sam, was it? Well, I ain't surprised; Sam is a nice obliging young fellow. . . . *(Eagerly.)* Where is he now?

GERTIE

Right outside here, I suppose. He was going back to his carpenter's work. . . . Now I *must* put these things away. *(Exit GERTIE to the kitchen. HIRAM follows her as far as the door and stands there looking after her. TIM, after a glance at HIRAM, takes his hat from the nail by the door, center, and tiptoes out of the door. At the door he waves, as if to some one outside. Exit TIM. Enter GERTIE, from kitchen, without her bundles.)*

GERTIE

Well, what have you and Uncle Tim been doing since I have been out? Why, where is Uncle Tim?

HIRAM

Eh? . . . *(Looking around.)* Sho, he don't seem to be here. Well, it's just as well, maybe. Gertie, come here and sit down. I've got something important to talk to you about.

GERTIE

Important? . . . It must be. You look **very** serious.

THE MANAGERS

(She sits in the chair that TIM formerly occupied. HIRAM hitches his chair forward and looks at her soberly and nervously.)

HIRAM

Well, I am serious. It's a serious matter. . . . Tim ain't where he can hear, is he?

GERTIE

No. His cap is gone, so he must have gone, too. Has this serious matter of yours anything to do with Uncle Tim?

HIRAM

Eh? *(Loudly.)* You bet your life it ain't! He's just the one it *ain't* got anything to do with. Gertie *(leaning forward and speaking in an earnest whisper)*, I want to talk to you about—getting married.

GERTIE *(gazing at him in amazement)*

Getting married! . . . Why, Uncle Hiram, you don't mean *you* are going to get *married*?

HIRAM

Me! *Me!* Say, do I *look* as if I'd gone crazy?

GERTIE

But you said Uncle Tim hadn't anything to do with it, so *(Stopping short as the thought comes to her, and turning in her chair.)* Why! Why! . . . Uncle Hiram! Have. . . . Why, what *do* you mean?

HIRAM

I'm telling you what I mean. Gertie, some of these days *you'll* be gettin' married. . . . Did you ever think of that?

GERTIE *(still gazing at him; speaking slowly)*

Why, why, yes, I—I—suppose I have thought of it. . . . But I didn't imagine *you* had.

HIRAM

You don't realize how much I think. If it wasn't for my thinking, and planning, and managing, things aboard this craft wouldn't go along as smooth as they do. I've noticed

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

you growing up, and young fellows coming to see you, and all that, and it's been borne down on to my mind that some day you'd be wanting to get married.

GERTIE (*a trifle relieved, and repressing a smile*)

Oh, I see! Then you think *I* am the one who has gone crazy?

HIRAM

Eh! Why, no—no, I don't. You're a woman, and all women are crazy when it comes to getting married. The main thing for me to do is to make sure that you marry the right one. See?

GERTIE

I'm not exactly sure that I do see. Who *is* the right one?

HIRAM

I'm coming to that. Now, last summer when that young Randall Holt was vacationing in town, I thought—I commenced to think—

GERTIE (*eagerly, as he hesitates*)

Yes, Uncle Hiram? Yes? What did you think about Randall—Mr. Holt, I mean?

HIRAM

I thought he was a good, nice-appearing boy. I liked him fust-rate—all but his silly no-account chromo painting, of course. . . . But there, he's gone and past. He's out of it.

GERTIE (*turning again to look at him*)

What do you mean by—"out of it"?

HIRAM

Eh? Hain't you heard? Randall Holt's engaged.

GERTIE (*still looking at him*)

Uncle Hiram! . . . Where did you hear— Who told you that?

HIRAM

Tim just told me. He says George Willis met a fellow who knows Randall and Randall said he was engaged to be

THE MANAGERS

married. Eh? What makes you look so funny? *Had* you heard about it afore?

GERTIE (*after a moment and without looking at him*)

Did—did Mr. Willis say who Randall was engaged to?

HIRAM

No. Tim didn't hear that. It's some Boston girl, we cal'late. But his being engaged is enough, so far as you're concerned. You see now what I mean by saying he's out of it?

GERTIE (*still without looking at him*)

Oh, yes . . . yes, Uncle Hiram. I see what you mean.

HIRAM

Course you do. Well then (*Bending forward to look at her.*) Why, Gertie, what's the matter? You ain't crying, are you?

GERTIE (*who has her handkerchief before her face*)

No, Uncle Hiram. I'm—I'm not crying—exactly.

HIRAM

Exactly? (*Rising and putting his arm about her. Much disturbed.*) There, there, Gertie. I suppose I did break it to you kind of sudden. I didn't realize you'd feel bad about it. Course I kind of suspicioned you liked him, but I never thought. . . . Sho! There, there! Humph! You *did* like him, didn't you?

GERTIE

Yes, I—I liked him. Didn't *you* like him, Uncle Hiram?

HIRAM (*trying to please*)

Sartin! I liked him fine. Why I've said to Tim a thousand times, says I, "If ever there was a young fellow good enough for our Gertie, it's that Randall." But that was afore we heard he was fool enough to get engaged.

GERTIE

But you really liked him? And if he hadn't been—engaged—you wouldn't have minded if—if—

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

HIRAM

If he'd married you, you mean? Oh, not a mite, not a mite. I'd been tickled to death. But—

GERTIE

Uncle Hiram, do you really truly mean that?

HIRAM

Course I mean it. . . . But don't let's waste time talking about *him*. He's out of it, and there's somebody else for you and me to talk about now.

GERTIE (*turning to look at him once more*)

Oh—oh? Oh! I see! There is some one else, is there?

HIRAM

You bet there is! Gertie, there's been a young fellow coming here to see you lately, and—

GERTIE

Coming to see me? Why, Uncle Hiram, you must mean— Oh, you *can't* mean—oh, you *can't* mean you want me to marry Sam Doane?

HIRAM (*springing to his feet*)

Sam Doane! Sam Doane! Godfreys mighty, Gertie! *don't* talk so. You wouldn't marry *that* critter? Oh, don't say you want to marry *him*!

GERTIE (*patting his hand soothingly*)

Hush, hush, Uncle Hiram! You needn't worry. I wouldn't marry Sam Doane if he was the last man on earth.

HIRAM (*delighted*)

Fine! Fine! Will you promise me that?

GERTIE

Indeed I will! I give you my word of honor, Uncle Hiram.

HIRAM

Good enough! (*Triumphantly.*) There, "one boss," I guess that plasters *your* nose. Ho, ho! And now, Gertie—

THE MANAGERS

GERTIE (*interrupting*)

Wait! Isn't that Uncle Tim coming now?

(TIM *is heard outside, whistling.*)

HIRAM

Consarn it all! Had to heave in sight just at the wrong time, of course. (*Hurriedly.*) Gertie, there's just one more question I wanted to ask you. Have you ever thought about Ed Larrabee?

GERTIE

Thought about Ed Larrabee? Why, I saw him only a little while ago. He walked with me from the grocery store as far as the corner. He was on his way to the telegraph office. I met Ed before I met Sam. . . . Why shouldn't I think of him?

HIRAM

You should. You should. That's what I want you to do. You think about him—and think hard.

GERTIE

Ed Larrabee! Think about Ed Larrabee! Why, Uncle Hiram, is *he* the one you—

HIRAM

Sshh! You *will* think about him, won't you, Gertie?

GERTIE

Why—yes, Uncle. I will think about him, if you want me to.

HIRAM

That's my girl! Fine! Fine! We'll have another talk pretty soon. Sshh! Here's Uncle Tim. Don't let him know we've been saying anything. . . . Get away from me! Look innocent. Look same as I do.

(*He looks anything but innocent as TIM enters, center. TIM is whistling a triumphal march. He does not notice HIRAM's agitation. He comes to front of stage as HIRAM goes back.*)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

TIM (*cheerfully*)

It's a fine day out— A fine day. Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high. (*Sarcastically.*) I presume likely you've been managing the weather, Hiram, and that accounts for it. Eh?

(HIRAM *grunts*. GERTIE *is at the table down front, arranging the newspapers*. TIM *joins her*. HIRAM *goes to door and looks out.*)

HIRAM (*at the door*)

Gone to the telegraph office, eh?

GERTIE

What, Uncle Hiram?

HIRAM

Oh, nothing. I'm going out to get a breath of fresh air. (*Glaring at TIM.*) There's likely to be too much *hot* air in here from now on.

(*Takes his hat and exits, center.*)

GERTIE

Well, I must go and see about my supper.

(*She moves toward the kitchen but TIM detains her.*)

TIM

Wait a minute, Gertie. I—I want to talk with you a minute.

GERTIE

But my supper cooking is important, Uncle Tim.

TIM

This is pretty important, too. Set down here in the rocker, Gertie.

(*She sits, after a look at his face.*)

TIM (*sitting in the chair HIRAM has been occupying*)

Gertie, I—I—

GERTIE (*after another look and repressing a smile*)

Yes, Uncle Tim, what is it?

THE MANAGERS

TIM (*bracing himself for an ordeal*)

Gertie, have you ever thought about—about—getting married?

GERTIE (*calmly*)

Why, yes, I have thought of it—sometimes. I suppose all girls do. . . . And some men.

TIM

Humph! Sensible men don't. But girls and women they . . . well, they need somebody to look out for 'em—and manage things for 'em—and so it's natural they think about marrying. Um. . . . Yes. Well, I've been thinking about you, Gertie.

GERTIE

Have you, Uncle Tim? That's awfully kind and unselfish of you. Thank you ever so much.

TIM

You're welcome! that's all right. But, as I look at it, it's part of my job to see that you don't make mistakes. And ever since the fellows began to come around here, I've been sizing 'em up and taking stock of 'em.

GERTIE

Have you? How wonderful!

TIM

Um-hm. Now last summer when that young Randall Holt was calling so reg'lar I sized *him* up. If he'd had a decent job, one that he could earn a living at, I wouldn't have made no great objection. You liked him, didn't you, Gertie?

GERTIE (*with apparent hesitation*)

Yes, I liked him, Uncle Tim. But—well, I understand he is engaged to be married now.

TIM

Eh? Why, yes, so he is. How did you know it?

GERTIE

Oh, some one told me.

(*Business with handkerchief as in interview with HIRAM.*)

TIM (*noting handkerchief*)

Here! Here! What is it? My soul and body, Gertie.

You—you don't feel as bad about it as all *that*, do you?

GERTIE (*handkerchief business*)

No, Uncle Tim. I—I want him to be happy, of course. But I—I *did* like him. . . . And I hoped you liked him, too.

TIM (*greatly troubled and striving to please her*)

Who, me? Like Randall Holt? Sartin, I like him. I—I was crazy about him. If you married him—that is I mean if you *could* have married him, I'd have been as happy as a clam.

GERTIE (*impulsively leaning forward and kissing him*)

Oh, thank you, Uncle Tim! Thank you so much for saying that.

TIM

Here! Hi! Hold on! He's engaged to marry a Boston girl. What difference does it make now whether I like him or not?

GERTIE

Oh, of course it doesn't make any, really. But I love you and Uncle Hiram so dearly that I just want you to like any one I like, that's all.

TIM (*relieved*)

Oh, that's it! I see. Well, I liked Randall fine—all but his job. But he's out of the race. Now there's somebody else. Gertie, who was it came to see you last evening? Eh; who was it?

GERTIE (*reflecting*)

Last evening? Let me see. Why, Ed Larrabee called last evening.

THE MANAGERS

TIM (*jumping up*)

Heavens and airth! Gertie Salters, you don't take that Ed Larrabee serious, do you? *Don't* tell me you do!

GERTIE

Take him seriously? Ed Larrabee? Why—

TIM

For thunder sakes, Gertie, *don't* say you're going to marry Ed Larrabee!

GERTIE (*laughing*)

Marry him, Uncle Tim? Marry Ed Larrabee! I wouldn't marry him for all the money in the world.

TIM

Hooray! . . . You'll swear to that, will you?

GERTIE

Of course I will. Marry Ed Larrabee! The idea!

TIM

Great stuff! *He's* settled—and so is his “manager.” Ho, ho! . . . But, Gertie, there's another chap. When I said last evening I didn't mean it; I meant evening afore last. Who was it came to see you then?

GERTIE

Why—why, Sam Doane called night before last.

TIM

Sartin sure he did! Gertie. . . . (*Breaking off as HIRAM is heard singing outside.*) Oh, dear, dear! Here's Hiram. Right in the wrong place, as usual. I can't say any more now. But, Gertie, promise me you'll think about Sam Doane. Think him over, will you? Promise me you will?

GERTIE

Why—yes, I will think about Sam Doane, if it pleases you, Uncle Tim.

TIM

That's the ticket! Sshh! Here's Hiram. Don't tell him what we've said. Look out, here he comes.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

(HIRAM enters, center, singing "*John Brown's Body*," and very cheerful.)

GERTIE

There, now I must leave you two to keep company for a while. I *must* attend to my supper.

(Exit GERTIE to the kitchen. HIRAM comes forward. He looks at TIM and grins. TIM looks at him, also grinning.)

HIRAM (*sarcastically*)

Well, how's the "one boss" getting along?

TIM (*serene*)

Fust rate, thank you kindly. How's the great and only manager of all creation making it?

HIRAM

If you mean me I'm pretty toler'ble satisfied. You'll have to see Sammie and fix the wedding day pretty soon, won't you? Better get busy or you might be too late.

TIM

Humph! I suppose your pet Eddie will expect to be invited, won't he?

HIRAM

Say, Tim, you and me have got a little bet, remember. You bet me a dollar we'd have salt fish and potatoes for supper to-night.

TIM

I ain't forgot that you bet *me* a dollar we'd have corned beef and cabbage. Ain't trying to back out, are you?

HIRAM

Who—me? I ain't the backing kind. Come; you always claim to be some sport. Do you want to make another bet?

TIM (*serenely*)

I'm always glad to take easy money. What's your bet?

HIRAM

I'll bet you five dollars that our Gertie don't marry Sam Doane.

THE MANAGERS

TIM

I'll take that bet! And now I'll bet *you* five she don't marry Ed Larrabee!

HIRAM

Done! My! My! but you must be rich, heaving money away like that.

TIM

Heaving it away! Huh! Hiram, I'm kind of sorry for you, so I'll give you a straight tip right now. I *know* I'm going to win all three of those bets. That's the honest straight truth.

HIRAM

Ho, ho! Well, Tim, I'll give in that part of it *is* the truth. There's only one word that's wrong.

TIM

What do you mean? What word?

HIRAM

"Win" is the word. It ought to be "lose." You're going to *lose* all three bets.

TIM

Hiram Salters, I'll bet you—

HIRAM

Tim Tidditt, I'll bet you. . . . Sshh!

(They are again interrupted by GERTIE, who enters from the kitchen. Her sleeves are rolled up and she is wearing a cooking apron. She is too earnest, having reached a determination, to notice their embattled attitude and they subside into a truce as she moves forward.)

TIM

Why, hello, Gertie! What's the matter? Thought you was ten fathom deep in cooking by this time.

GERTIE

I ought to be, and I must be, soon. But I—well, there is something on my mind, something very, very important,

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

and I simply could not cook or do anything else until I had had a talk with both of you. Now you sit here, Uncle Tim. . . . Don't interrupt! Just mind what I tell you. Sit down.

(HIRAM and TIM exchange puzzled looks and then sit in the chairs she has indicated.)

GERTIE

And I will sit here in the middle. (*She brings forward a third chair and sits between them.*) There! Now we are all cozy and comfortable, aren't we? . . . No, don't interrupt. Now, first, tell me this— You two love me, don't you?

HIRAM

Love you? Well, I should say we did! What kind of fool question is that?

TIM

Love you? Me and Hiram? You didn't think we was liable to love anybody else, did you?

GERTIE

Sshh! And you both want me to be happy—always?

TIM

Sartin we do!

HIRAM

Course we do! That's why I—

GERTIE

Sshh! Please! . . . Well, because you do love me and because you want me to be happy, I am going to tell you something that will make *you* very happy. Uncle Hiram and Uncle Tim, it is all settled. I *am* going to be happy always.

TIM (*looking at her and then at HIRAM*)

What on earth—?

HIRAM

What's all this "happy" business? He's happy and I'm

THE MANAGERS

happy, and you're going to be happy? What are you talking about, Gertie?

GERTIE

That is what I'm going to tell you now. When, a few minutes ago, you both told me how you felt, and were both so perfectly sweet about it, I—well, I couldn't put off telling you any longer.

TIM (*more puzzled than ever*)

I'd say you hadn't told much *yet*. Hiram, is there anything but fog around *your* jib boom?

HIRAM

Not a blamed thing. It's thicker than mud where *I'm* cruising.

GERTIE

It will be ever so plain in a minute. First of all it pleased me so much to know you were both willing I should be married.

TIM

Eh? Here? Hold on! I said provided you married the right man.

HIRAM

That's it. And I told you I had the right man. Gertie, while I think of it I want to tell you that Ed Larrabee is coming here to supper to-morrow night. I asked him when I went out just now, and he said he'd come.

TIM (*jumping up*)

What? You asked Ed Larrabee to supper? Well of all the cheek! I want you to understand that Sam Doane'll be here to supper to-morrow night. I went out just now on purpose and hunted him up and asked him, myself. If you cal'late—

GERTIE (*interrupting*)

Hush! It will be all right. They can both come. I shan't be here to-morrow evening, anyway.

TIM

You won't be here—to supper?

HIRAM

Won't be *here*? Where will you be?

GERTIE

I am going over to Bayport to the Hotel for supper and a dance—with Randall.

TIM

Randall!

HIRAM

Randall! You don't mean Randall *Holt*?

GERTIE

Yes. That is one of the things I had to tell you. Randall is coming down from Boston on the afternoon train to-day and he will be here at supper to-night.

HIRAM

Randall Holt coming here! To see you! Why, Gertie!

TIM

Heavens and earth, Gertie, what are you thinking of? Randall Holt can't come to see you any more. He's an engaged man. What does he think he is—a Mormon?

GERTIE (*laughing*)

Oh no, not as bad as that. And now comes the second thing I had to tell you. Randall *is* engaged. You both heard that he was. But you didn't hear to whom he is engaged. (*Demurely.*) You see, Uncle Tim and Uncle Hiram, he is engaged to *me*.

(HIRAM and TIM are too paralyzed to speak. They simply stare and gasp.)

GERTIE (*continuing*)

Yes. We had been engaged for almost a month before I came down on my vacation. And now he is coming to spend *his* vacation with me. He is feeling—we are feeling (*with a little laugh*) very wealthy now because he has

THE MANAGERS

just been given an order for a big mural decoration. Ten pictures at a thousand dollars apiece. So, of course—

HIRAM (*can stand it no longer*)

Wait! Heave to! Come up into the wind! Ten thousand dollars for—for *ten* chromos! I—I—
(*He collapses in chair.*)

TIM (*wildly*)

Ten thousand dollars! Oh, somebody's crazy! I'm asleep! I've got nightmare!

GERTIE

No, no, no! It's true. That isn't such a big price for Randall's work. He is—every one calls him—one of our most promising young artists. And the best of it is, he means to do a lot of painting down here, so I shan't have to be away from my precious uncles, after all. Isn't that splendid?

HIRAM (*still gasping*)

My soul and body! And *he* (*pointing to TIM*) was dead set on a carpenter.

TIM (*indignantly*)

Well, what did *you* pick? A telegraph operator!

GERTIE

Ever since I've been home I have wanted to tell you, but I was afraid. It wasn't until you told me, only a few minutes ago, that you would be as happy as a clam if I married Randall. . . . That is what you said, Uncle Tim.

HIRAM

What? *What?* Did you say that, Tim Tidditt?

TIM (*very much upset*)

Why—why, I don't know but I did; but I—well, you see, she—

GERTIE

And Uncle Hiram said the same thing. He said if I married Randall he would be tickled to death.

TIM

Hiram Salters! Did *you* tell her *that*?

HIRAM (*confused*)

Why—why, maybe I did. But that was when she was—
was crying.

GERTIE

Oh, I wasn't crying—not really. Or, if I did, it was because I was just happy. It was so lovely of you both to say such things, just of your own free wills, you know. It showed me that you had been planning for me and managing things for me, just as you always do. Oh! it was wonderful! I must hug you both. (*She does, and rises.*) There! If I wait a minute longer the chicken pie won't be ready for supper.

(*She goes toward the kitchen door.*)

HIRAM

Here! Hold on! What's that you said? Chicken pie! We're going to have a b'iled dinner, ain't we?

TIM

Chicken pie, nothing! It's salt fish and potatoes to-night.

GERTIE (*smiling upon them both. Her tone is that of a kindly mother to unreasonable children.*)

Now, Uncle Hiram, you know cabbage never agrees with you. And a salt fish dinner *always* makes Uncle Tim uncomfortable all the next day. I knew you were both making believe and that what you really wanted was the chicken pie. That agrees with *everybody*. . . . And Randall is very fond of it.

(*Exit GERTIE to kitchen. Her two uncles are collapsed wrecks in their chairs.*)

HIRAM (*after a moment*)

Humph! Well, somebody I know ain't going to get his fish and potatoes.

THE MANAGERS

TIM

Yes; and somebody *I* know won't have his corned beef and cabbage.

HIRAM

And somebody won't get his Sam Doane.

TIM

And somebody else won't get his Ed Larrabee.

(Another moment's pause. Then HIRAM shakes his head.)

HIRAM

Tim, it looks as if you and me would get what was ordered for us—that's chicken pie and Randall.

TIM

It does, Hiram, that's a fact.

(They look at each other and chuckle, as the humor of the situation comes over them.)

TIM

Say, Hiram, that girl has done just what Huldy Simmons said—wound us 'round her finger. . . . And we've been cal'ulating *we* managed *her*!

HIRAM

Tim, you remember that piece in the paper about every family having one boss? Well, I guess we know who that one is, don't we?

TIM

Kind of does look so. *(As HIRAM bursts into a laugh.)*

Yes, the joke *is* on us.

HIRAM *(between laughs)*

It ain't that. I was just thinking that we've got one advantage over Randall Holt. *We* know who's boss *now*.

TIM

But *he*'ll find it out! Ho, ho!

(They laugh uproariously. Enter GERTIE from the kitchen, flour on her hands and arms and a mixing bowl and spoon in her hands.)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GERTIE

I heard you laughing and I couldn't help coming to look at you. I suppose you two old dears are so happy because you have had your own way.

(The laugh breaks off short. TIM and HIRAM stare at her.)

HIRAM

Our own way!

TIM

Our way!

(They look at each other and then burst into shouts of laughter, rocking back and forth in their chairs. GERTIE beams upon them indulgently as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

FINDERS-KEEPERS

A MODERN REALISTIC COMEDY

by GEORGE KELLY

NOTE.—The form of the present manuscript is exactly that in which this play was presented continuously for a period of three years in the principal Keith and Orpheum Theaters of the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada.—AUTHOR.

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FINDERS-KEEPERS

"Finders-Keepers" is a cynical little slice of life, laid in the same setting as Mr. Kelly's most popular long play, "The Show Off"—a suburb of Philadelphia. In this piece your director should strive for an effect of reality both in his settings and in the acting. Much of the effectiveness of this play would be lost if it were acted before draperies; it demands the Belascoan fidelity to detail. Since its power lies in the unconscious revelation of the wife's dishonesty, the utmost care should be taken in casting the rôle of Mrs. Aldrid. She should be the woman in your group who best typifies the "average wife," and in her actions and the way she dresses, there should be a suggestion of shallowness and complacency. After Aldrid's final exit be particularly careful to follow the author's directions explicitly, for the lowering of the curtain too quickly will dissipate the value of the husband's devastating implication.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR EUGENE ALDRID

Roll of blue prints

Newspaper

Telegram

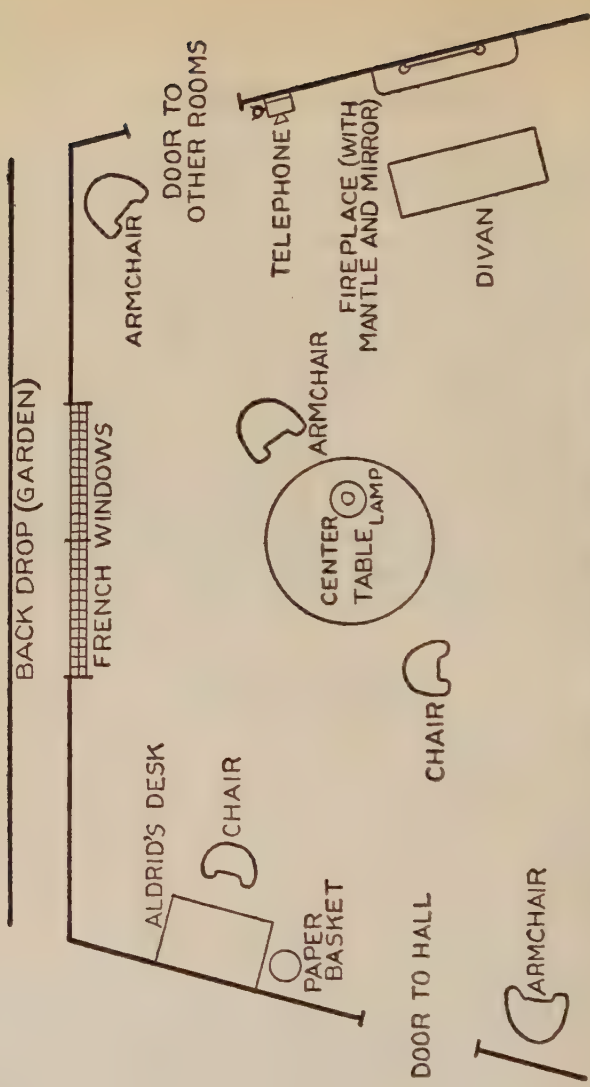
Notepaper

Book

Gold mesh purse

FOR MRS. ALDRID

Several parcels



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "FINDERS-KEEPERS"

FINDERS-KEEPERS

CHARACTERS

EUGENE ALDRID

MRS. ALDRID, *his wife*

MRS. HAMPTON, *a neighbor*

SCENE: *The living room of EUGENE ALDRID's home, which is located in an outlying suburb of the City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. All curtains are of quiet cretonne, and there are sheaves of autumn leaves about. The garden, through the window at the back, is bright with scarlet sage.*

TIME: *About five o'clock of a late September afternoon.*

After a second's stillness, a door closes out at the right, and immediately MRS. ALDRID enters through the archway, carrying several parcels, which she hastens to deposit on the center table; then she straightens up and draws a deep breath. She is a trim blonde, in her late twenties, wearing a tailored coat-suit of fawn-colored serge, a toque of champagne silk, and a waist of very pale pink silk. Her slippers and stockings are of the lighter shades of brown, and she wears a quite long string of freakish black-and-yellow beads. Before she has had time to take the second breath, the bronze clock on the mantelpiece, at the left, strikes five. She glances at it.

MRS. ALDRID

Heavens! five o'clock!

(She hurriedly removes her coat and hat, lays them on the sofa in front of the mantelpiece, and, with a glance at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece, vanishes through the door at the left.)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

Then there is a slight pause; and EUGENE ALDRID enters through the archway from the right, carrying a roll of blue prints in one hand, and the evening paper in the other. He is tall and thin, a very intelligent-looking man of perhaps thirty-three, wearing a dark blue, double-breasted business suit, dark shoes, and a dark tie. He sets the roll of blue prints down on the center table, and then MRS. ALDRID speaks to him from the room out at the left.)

MRS. ALDRID

Is that you, Gene?

ALDRID (*looking toward the left, and then starting over towards his desk at the right*)

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID

You must have been right behind me.

ALDRID (*laying the newspaper on his desk*)

Did you just get in?

MRS. ALDRID (*coming into the room from the left, adjusting a bungalow apron*)

This minute—I've been in town shopping; I had no idea it was so late.

ALDRID (*picking up a telegram from his desk, and opening it*)

It's after five.

MRS. ALDRID

I know it is; and there isn't a thing ready; you'll have to wait a while for your dinner.

ALDRID (*with an exaggerated sigh of resignation*)

Ah—ho!

(*He reads the telegram.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Did you come out on the four-fifty-three?

ALDRID (*without looking up*)

Yes; you weren't on it, were you?

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

No, I'd intended coming out on the train, but—something happened that made me change my mind.

ALDRID (*looking straight ahead, thinking; and tapping the telegram, which he has finished reading, against his hand*) Spaulding. (*Turning suddenly to MRS. ALDRID.*) What? Why—what happened?

MRS. ALDRID (*assuming an air of great confidence*)

Wait till I tell you! (*She steps to the back of the room and looks keenly out into the hallway, to assure herself that no one is within hearing—then comes down to the left of her husband, who watches her curiously.*) You know, I went into town this afternoon to get some Georgette crêpe for that new blouse of mine.

ALDRID

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID

Well—as I went into the Market Street entrance of Blum's—you know, there's a glove counter right inside the Market Street door. (ALDRID *nods.*) Well, I went over to ask the saleslady where I could get the crêpe; and, as I leaned over to ask her, I stepped on something; it felt like a bracelet or something—rather soft—and yet it was metallic.

ALDRID

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID

Well, I didn't pay any attention to it at first—I thought it might be a joke or something—you know, they're always doing that sort of thing in those department stores.

ALDRID

Yes, I know.

MRS. ALDRID

But, as I started away from the counter, I just glanced down at the floor; and, what do you suppose it was?

ALDRID

What?

MRS. ALDRID

A purse—one of those little gold mesh purses.

ALDRID

Anything in it?

MRS. ALDRID

Well now, wait till I tell you. I didn't open it right away; I was afraid some one might be looking; so I waited till I got up to the writing room before I opened it; and, what do you suppose was in it?

ALDRID

What?

MRS. ALDRID

Four—hundred—dollars.

ALDRID (*after a slight pause*)

Four hundred dollars?

MRS. ALDRID

Hum—hum.

ALDRID (*incredulously*)

Where is it?

MRS. ALDRID

In my pocketbook.

ALDRID

Well, are you sure it's real money?

MRS. ALDRID

Of course it is; I'll show it to you in a minute. You know, I could scarcely believe my eyes at first; because, you know, I've never found anything in all my life; and then to suddenly pick up *eight* fifty-dollar bills. Positively, Gene, I don't know how I ever got home.

ALDRID

Were they all fifties?

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

Hum-hum; and brand-new ones at that; they look as though they'd just been taken out of a bank.

ALDRID (*turning suddenly and leaning on the chair in front of his desk, then looking at her*)

Can you imagine *losing* that!

MRS. ALDRID

Losing it? Can you imagine finding it? I thought I was seeing things.

(*She starts towards the door at the left.*)

ALDRID

Did you say anything about it?

MRS. ALDRID (*stopping, and turning to him*)

How do you mean?

ALDRID

At the "Lost and Found"?

MRS. ALDRID

No, of course I didn't; what do you think I am?

ALDRID

You might have gotten in touch with the owner.

MRS. ALDRID (*smiling indulgently*)

Positively, Gene, you talk like a boy from the country.

ALDRID

Why so?

MRS. ALDRID (*with a touch of impatience, and coming to the left of the center table*)

Because you do! Don't you know that if I were to turn that amount of money into a "Lost and Found" desk, I'd stand just about as much chance of ever seeing it again as I would of seeing the North Pole?

ALDRID

Well, you wouldn't expect ever to see it again if it were returned to the owner?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MRS. ALDRID

And, how would I know that it *had* been returned to the owner?

ALDRID

Oh, everybody isn't dishonest!

(He glances through the telegram again.)

MRS. ALDRID

Well, you let people get their hands on four hundred dollars—you'll find out how many of them are honest! Turn that amount of money over to one of those "Lost and Found" clerks—he'd soon find an owner for it, believe me!

(She starts for the door at the left.)

ALDRID *(crushing the telegram in his hand)*

What are you going to do with it?

(She stops at the door and looks back at him. He gracefully tosses the telegram overhand into the waste-paper basket below his desk.)

MRS. ALDRID

I'm going to keep it!

ALDRID

Ho!

MRS. ALDRID *(surprised that he should ask such a question)*

What do you suppose I'm going to do with it—throw it away? It's as good in my pocket as it is in anybody's else! *(He turns and looks at her in a way that disconcerts her slightly, but, as he withdraws his eyes in turning to his desk, she regains herself, and comes a step or two farther into the room.)* I can get awnings for this whole house for that—and a Victrola, too!

ALDRID *(coming over to the center table for his blue prints, after looking for them on his desk)*

You'd better not count your chickens before they're hatched.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID (*after looking at him for a second*)

What do you mean?

ALDRID (*picking up the roll of blue prints from the table, and speaking rather abstractedly*)

Why, there'll very likely be an ad for it in one of the morning papers.

MRS. ALDRID

Well, what if there is?

ALDRID (*looking at the blue prints*)

Nothing, only you'd simply have to return it that's all.

MRS. ALDRID (*after thinking for a second, and with an expression of sudden calculation*)

I don't see why I should.

(*He raises his eyes from the blue prints and looks at her quizzically.*)

ALDRID

You don't see why you should return lost property to the person who lost it?

MRS. ALDRID

That depends.

ALDRID (*in a level tone*)

Upon what?

MRS. ALDRID (*looking straight ahead*)

Whether or not I was sure he'd lost it.

ALDRID

Couldn't you make sure?

MRS. ALDRID (*after turning and looking at him*)

How?

ALDRID

Identification.

MRS. ALDRID

Not in this case.

ALDRID

Why not?

MRS. ALDRID

Because there isn't a solitary thing about it, Gene, by which it could possibly be identified: not a card or a paper of any kind!

ALDRID

How about the purse?

MRS. ALDRID

There are a million exactly like it; a plain, gold mesh bag. (*Indicating the desk at the right.*) I've had one in that top drawer there for the past year.

ALDRID

Couldn't the money be described?

MRS. ALDRID

That wouldn't be any identification.

ALDRID

Why not?

MRS. ALDRID

Why, because—money is simply money!—unless it's marked; and this isn't, because I've examined it very carefully.

ALDRID (*resting one end of the roll of blue prints on the table, and leaning his elbow on the other end*)

So you don't see any possible way by which this money could be returned to its owner?

MRS. ALDRID

Not unless I took his word for it; (*turning and looking at him*) and, really, I don't see why I should do that.

ALDRID (*evenly*)

What are you trying to do, make yourself believe it belongs to you?

MRS. ALDRID (*turning her head away*)

I found it.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

ALDRID

And somebody else lost it.

MRS. ALDRID

I suppose so.

ALDRID

Possibly some poor man or woman.

MRS. ALDRID (*with a little toss of her head*)

Now, don't get sentimental, please!

ALDRID (*with a touch of impatience, and taking a couple of steps in front of the table towards her*)

That isn't sentiment at all!

MRS. ALDRID (*turning to him sharply, and speaking incisively*)

No very poor man or woman has any eight fifty-dollar bills to lose. (*She turns away, and secures a hairpin at the back of her head: he looks at her steadily.*) And no matter who lost it, it'll be a very good lesson to him to be a little more careful in the future.

ALDRID

I see. Well, why should he pay *you* four hundred dollars for that lesson?

MRS. ALDRID

Nobody's paying *me* four hundred dollars.

ALDRID

You've often lost things yourself, haven't you?

MRS. ALDRID (*turning to him quickly*)

Yes, and I never got them back, either!

ALDRID

Whose fault was that?

MRS. ALDRID (*turning away again*)

I don't know whose fault it was.

ALDRID

Well, try and think.

MRS. ALDRID

Unless the people who found them weren't honest enough to return them. (*The door out at the right closes.*) Who's that?

(*She starts for the archway at the right, tossing her apron on to the sofa as she goes.*)

ALDRID (*turning and crossing to his desk*)

Somebody at the door.

MRS. ALDRID (*in a lowered tone*)

Don't say anything about this. (*She reaches the archway.*) Oh, it's you, Mrs. Hampton!

(*ALDRID half glances toward the archway, then picks up the evening paper and flips it open.*)

MRS. HAMPTON (*in the hallway*)

Yes, it's me.

MRS. ALDRID (*rather effusively*)

Come right in!

(*She extends her arm and hand, and leads MRS. HAMPTON into the room. MRS. HAMPTON is a dark woman, with a pale but lovely face, and a certain Madonna quality about her generally. She is of the same build as MRS. ALDRID, and, apparently, of the same age. She wears a coat-suit of good black, a white silk waist, with a little string of purple beads at her throat, and a medium-sized hat of very dark, purple-colored straw, trimmed with an ornament of itself. Her slippers and stockings are black.*)

MRS. HAMPTON

Good evening.

MRS. ALDRID

Good evening, dear, how are you?

ALDRID

Good evening, Mrs. Hampton.

MRS. HAMPTON

Oh, good evening, Mr. Aldrid, I didn't see you. I hope you'll both excuse me for coming in without ringing.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

ALDRID (*tossing his paper on to the desk*)

Don't mention it.

MRS. ALDRID (*standing back of the center table*)

Saved me the trouble of answering the door; it's the girl's day out.

MRS. HAMPTON

Well, I *do* hope I haven't intruded.

MRS. ALDRID

You haven't at all, dear, really; I've just gotten in from town.

MRS. HAMPTON

I've been in the city, too; I came out on the four-fifty-three.

ALDRID (*placing a chair, which he has taken from above his desk, about midway between the center table and the archway*)

Won't you take a chair, Mrs. Hampton?

MRS. HAMPTON

No, thank you, Mr. Aldrid, I can't stay a moment.

ALDRID

I'm sorry.

(*He moves down to his desk again and picks up the paper.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Why not?

MRS. HAMPTON (*obviously troubled about something*)

Oh, I'm so upset.

MRS. ALDRID

Are you ill, dear?

MRS. HAMPTON

No—but—I'd like to ask your advice about something.

MRS. ALDRID

Well, do sit down for a minute.

(MRS. HAMPTON *hesitates, then sits.* MRS. ALDRID *takes a chair from the back, and, placing it above the center table and slightly to the left of it, sits also.* ALDRID *stands at the lower corner of his desk, reading the paper. There is a slight pause.*)

MRS. ALDRID
What is it?

MRS. HAMPTON (*speaking directly to MRS. ALDRID*)
I've lost some money.
(ALDRID *lifts his eyes over the top of his paper and looks straight out; MRS. ALDRID looks straight into MRS. HAMPTON'S eyes for a second, then rises quietly, still holding her eyes, and moves to the center table.*)

MRS. ALDRID
Much?

MRS. HAMPTON
Quite a bit, yes.

ALDRID (*without turning*)
Where did you lose it, Mrs. Hampton?

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning to him*)
I haven't an idea. (MRS. ALDRID *has been looking intently at her, but, at this, she shifts her eyes to ALDRID, with a shade of relief.*) But I think it was in town.
(ALDRID *turns and glances at his wife, but she shifts her eyes back again to MRS. HAMPTON.*)

ALDRID
How much was it?

MRS. HAMPTON
Why—

MRS. ALDRID (*quickly*)
I suppose you don't know the exact amount, do you, dear?

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning to her*)
Four hundred dollars. (ALDRID *looks at his wife, but she's looking blankly at MRS. HAMPTON.*) Isn't that dreadful!

FINDERS-KEEPERS

Of course, I know it would only be an item to some people—but, to me! I feel terrible about it!

(She breaks down and cries. ALDRID turns and looks at her; then, tossing his paper on to the desk, and thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, he turns and strolls towards the back of the room, looking significantly at his wife.)

MRS. ALDRID *(advancing and placing her hands on MRS. HAMPTON'S arms)*

Now, don't cry, Mrs. Hampton, it isn't that bad.

MRS. HAMPTON

Oh, I think it's *dreadful* to lose all that money!

MRS. ALDRID

I know it is, dear; I don't wonder you feel bad.

MRS. HAMPTON

Eight fifty-dollar bills!

(MRS. ALDRID is frozen into stillness. ALDRID steps forward eagerly from the archway, where he has been standing.)

ALDRID

Eight fifties?

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes.

ALDRID *(straightening up, and looking at his wife with an ingenuous smile)*

Eight fifties.

MRS. HAMPTON

And brand-new ones, too! It's awful!

(She begins crying again.)

ALDRID *(to his wife, voicelessly, and indicating MRS. HAMPTON with a nod)*

Why don't you tell her?

(MRS. ALDRID lifts her chin and looks at him icily; where-

upon he indicates MRS. HAMPTON again, with an austere point of his finger.)

MRS. ALDRID (*choosing the better part of valor, and leaning over the back of MRS. HAMPTON'S chair*)

Come now, Mrs. Hampton, you may not have lost it at all! (*ALDRID, who has been watching his wife narrowly, breaks slowly, and goes to his desk, where he spies a large scribbled note fastened to the desk light, to attract his attention. Detaching this, he sits on the lower corner of his desk and reads it.*)

MRS. HAMPTON (*tearfully*)

Oh, but I *have*, Mrs. Aldrid!

MRS. ALDRID

I know, my dear, but, you know, sometimes we think we've lost a thing, and we find out later that we haven't lost it at all.

MRS. HAMPTON

But, I've looked everywhere, and it's lost, I tell you!

MRS. ALDRID

But, you may find it again, honey.

MRS. HAMPTON

Oh, I don't think so!

MRS. ALDRID

Or some one else may find it.

MRS. HAMPTON

But, that wouldn't do me any good.

MRS. ALDRID

It would if the person who found it were honest.

MRS. HAMPTON

I'm afraid very few people are honest, if it cost them four hundred dollars.

(*ALDRID finishes reading the note, and sits looking out, thinking.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Well now, it may be one of those very few who has found it.

MRS. HAMPTON

I don't expect ever to get it again.

ALDRID

Nonsense, Mrs. Hampton!

MRS. HAMPTON

I don't.

ALDRID

Nonsense! Now, you wait and see.

(There is a pause: MRS. HAMPTON touches her handkerchief to her eyes.)

MRS. ALDRID *(looking away off)*

Of course, you'll have to advertise.

(There is a second before ALDRID grasps what she has said; then he turns his head sharply and looks at her; but she is still looking away off.)

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes, that's what I wanted to see Mr. Aldrid about. *(She turns to him.)* Which would be the best paper for me to advertise in?

(He sits looking at his wife until she turns and meets his eyes: then he abstractedly extends his arm and hand in a gesture of interrogation, to which she responds by a sudden and taut pressing of her closed hand against her breast. He rises, to divert the attention of MRS. HAMPTON, and, after leaning for a second upon the back of his desk chair, starts slowly across the room in front of the center table. As he passes MRS. HAMPTON, she rises also.)

MRS. HAMPTON

Now, don't let me worry you, Mr. Aldrid!

ALDRID *(abstractedly)*

No, no, it isn't that—I was just—wondering—

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning to* MRS. ALDRID)

If I'd thought it would bother you folks, I shouldn't have told you at all.

MRS. ALDRID

That's perfectly all right, dear.

MRS. HAMPTON

But I was so troubled when I got home, I simply *couldn't* stay in the house! I just *had* to come out and tell some one! And, my dear, I don't know how I'm *ever* going to tell Frank when he comes home to-night; because he said to me this morning, when I told him I was going to town—he said, "Can I *trust* you to deposit this money for me?" And I said, "What do you think I am, a thief?" "Well," he said, "you're always *losing* things!" "Well," I said, "there's no danger of my losing four hundred dollars." "Well," he said, "I hope not, or we'll get a guardian for you!" (*Starting to cry again.*) And then I go straight into the city and lose it! (*She cries a little, MRS. ALDRID stands watching her; and ALDRID, who is leaning on his elbow on the mantelpiece, over at the left, watches MRS. ALDRID.*) And, mind you, to make *sure* that nothing would happen to it, I didn't even put it with my other money!

MRS. ALDRID (*eagerly, but without moving*)

Where *did* you put it?

MRS. HAMPTON

In one of those little, gold mesh purses.

(*ALDRID accidentally tears the notepaper which he still has in his hand.*)

ALDRID

Mrs. Hampton!

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes?

ALDRID

Where did you first *miss* this money?

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. HAMPTON

When I was going up the steps into the bank.

ALDRID

Which bank?

MRS. HAMPTON

The Franklin National.

MRS. ALDRID

Where's that?

ALDRID

Broad and Chestnut. Where had you been before that?

MRS. HAMPTON

Why, when I came out of the station—after I got off the train—

ALDRID

Yes?

MRS. HAMPTON

I went over to Wanamaker's—to get some gloves.

(ALDRID *looks at her keenly.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Wanamaker's?

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning to her*)

Yes. (MRS. ALDRID *gives a significant look at ALDRID, but he is looking at MRS. HAMPTON.*) But they didn't have my size in what I wanted at Wanamaker's, so I crossed over to Blum's.

ALDRID (*quietly*)

Blum's glove counter?

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes.

(ALDRID *glances at his wife, but she is coughing into her handkerchief. He moves rather thoughtfully to the left of the center table, and, picking up a book, stands it on its end on the table and leans upon it.* MRS. HAMPTON *is stand-*

ing on the opposite side of the table, and MRS. ALDRID has moved quietly down to a point in front of ALDRID'S desk.)

ALDRID

You hadn't missed this money up to that time?

MRS. HAMPTON

No, and I'm quite sure I *had* it up to that time; because I hadn't opened my pocketbook from the time I left the house; and the money was *in* the big pocketbook.

ALDRID

I see; and you went directly from there to the bank?

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes, directly.

ALDRID

Then you think it was somewhere between Blum's glove counter and the bank steps that you lost it?

MRS. HAMPTON

It must have been: I imagine I must have pulled it out without knowing it, when I was paying for the gloves at Blum's.

ALDRID

Very likely.

MRS. HAMPTON

Or else, possibly, some one opened my pocketbook and took out the little purse (*turning to MRS. ALDRID*) when I wasn't looking. (*She begins to cry again, as she turns back to MR. ALDRID.*) You know they do that, Mr. Aldrid.

ALDRID (*abstractedly*)

Yes, I know they do.

MRS. ALDRID (*standing at the right, quietly toying with her beads, and looking straight ahead, with a calculating expression*)

There wasn't a card or a paper of any kind in the purse, was there?

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning to her*)

No, there wasn't a thing in it but the money.

MRS. ALDRID

That's too bad. (ALDRID *watches her narrowly.*) No initials on it?

MRS. HAMPTON

No, I've always been going to have my initials put on it—oh, I don't know—I never seemed to get 'round to it.

MRS. ALDRID

That makes it bad.

MRS. HAMPTON (*with the threat of a few more tears*)

Dear me, I wish I had, now.

MRS. ALDRID (*turning to her suddenly, with a kind of forced sincerity*)

Yes, because if some one find it, and answer your advertisement, he'll naturally expect you to be able to identify it—definitely; that is, before you could reasonably expect him to return it to you, I mean.

MRS. HAMPTON

Yes, I suppose he would; but, then, I could describe the purse and the money.

MRS. ALDRID (*with a tolerant smile*)

I know, my dear; but there may be a million purses exactly like it—

MRS. HAMPTON

That's true, too.

MRS. ALDRID

And, as far as the money is concerned, why—money is simply money; unless it's marked; and this isn't (*checking herself*), as you say—

MRS. HAMPTON

No, it isn't.

MRS. ALDRID

So that, really, a person would be more or less obliged to take your word for it, wouldn't he?

MRS. HAMPTON

I'm afraid he would.

MRS. ALDRID

And that's rather a lot for us to expect of people, isn't it, dear?

MRS. HAMPTON

Too much, I'm afraid.

MRS. ALDRID

Especially, when there's four hundred dollars in the bargain.

(She gives a little mirthless, self-conscious laugh, and settles the lace on MRS. HAMPTON'S lapel. ALDRID, who has been watching her steadily, turns his head away slowly, and his eyes wander about the floor.)

MRS. HAMPTON *(turning to the chair from which she arose)*

You're right, it is rather a poor prospect.

(She sits down.)

MRS. ALDRID

Oh, well—

MRS. HAMPTON

Unless some one who is really honest find it.

MRS. ALDRID *(looking curiously at one of the beads in her necklace)*

Of course, the only thing you *can* do is to advertise.

MRS. HAMPTON *(rising)*

Yes, I must, right away. *(Moving to the right of the center table.)* Which paper do you think it would be best for me to advertise in, Mr. Aldrid? *(He doesn't hear her.)* Mr. Aldrid?

ALDRID *(turning to her suddenly)*

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Hampton, what did—

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

She wants to know which paper you think it would be best for her to advertise in?

ALDRID (*directly to his wife*)

None of them—(*to MRS. HAMPTON, with a change of tone*) until she hears from me.

MRS. ALDRID (*quickly, and laying her hands on MRS. HAMPTON'S shoulder and arm*)

He means, he'll look up the circulations later, dear.

(ALDRID *looks at her for a rather long pause, but she avoids his eyes; then, as MRS. HAMPTON turns and looks at him, he speaks.*)

ALDRID

I'll telephone you after dinner, Mrs. Hampton.

(*He starts towards the back of the room.*)

MRS. HAMPTON

Well, that's very charming of you, Mr. Aldrid.

ALDRID

Don't mention it.

(*He passes out through the window into the garden; then stops abruptly, makes a taut, general movement of desperate irresolution, turns and steps back in through the window again; where, gripping the draperies in his hands, he stands watching his wife with an expression of stony suspicion.*)

MRS. HAMPTON (*to MRS. ALDRID*)

And I really feel that I owe you both a genuine apology for bothering you with my troubles.

(*Starting for the archway at the right.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*turning, and following her*)

That's what neighbors are for, dear.

MRS. HAMPTON

Good-by, Mr. Aldrid.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

ALDRID (*coming a step or two out of the window alcove*)
Good-by, Mrs. Hampton.

MRS. HAMPTON

I'll be waiting to hear from you.

ALDRID

Right away, I'll call you.

MRS. HAMPTON (*turning at the archway*)

And, be sure and ask for *me* when you telephone, won't you?

ALDRID

Yes, I shall.

MRS. HAMPTON

Thank you very much.

ALDRID

You're very welcome.

MRS. HAMPTON (*going out into the hallway at the right followed by MRS. ALDRID, who has been standing at the back of the room, just to the left of the archway*)

I don't want Frank to know anything about this, if possible.

MRS. ALDRID

No, there's no need of annoying him.

MRS. HAMPTON

I suppose he'll have to be told soon enough.

(ALDRID, *standing at the back of the room, watches his wife out into the hallway; then he turns sharply, and comes forward several steps, in a panic of indecision. Suddenly the impulse to recall MRS. HAMPTON whirls him round into a literal spring in the direction of the hallway, but, at this point, the definite closing of the front door arrests him, and he stands taut and still for a second, gripping the back of the chair which MRS. ALDRID occupied earlier in the action of the play. Then he shifts his position; and, gripping the chair with the other hand, leans upon it, and waits for his wife to come back from the door. Presently*

she darts into view between the archway portières, and stands regarding him with an expression of amused calculation. But he doesn't see her: so, after a glance over her shoulder into the hallway, she speaks.)

MRS. ALDRID

Did you see that?

ALDRID (*in a repressed, ominous tone*)

What?

MRS. ALDRID (*with a nod toward the hallway*)

She must have heard.

ALDRID

Have you told anybody?

MRS. ALDRID (*coming a little farther into the room*)

No!

ALDRID

I suppose the walls have ears?

MRS. ALDRID

Not necessarily.

ALDRID (*turning to her sharply and searching her with a look*)

Then, how would she know?

MRS. ALDRID

She must have heard me—there in the hallway!

ALDRID (*mercilessly*)

When?

MRS. ALDRID (*becoming slightly disconcerted under his gaze*)

A few minutes ago—when I was telling you I'd found a purse.

ALDRID (*after a fractional pause, and tilting his head a bit on one side, to look at her more quizzically*)

How would she overhear you—she wasn't in the hallway?

MRS. ALDRID

Wasn't she!

ALDRID (*whipping the chair upon which he is leaning out of the way, and coming forward in a trembling rage*)

You know very well she wasn't! (*She crosses the back of the room towards the left, watching him. He stops in the middle of the room, and forward, and continues speaking, but without looking at her.*) What are you trying to do, kid yourself, or me!

(*He goes towards his desk at the right, and she comes forward at the left.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*picking up her apron from the sofa*)

I suppose you didn't take notice of the fact that she came in without ringing, did you?

ALDRID

Well, what of it, what of it, what of it!

MRS. ALDRID (*taking his tone*)

Nothing! Only just think it over while I'm getting your dinner!

(*She starts towards the door at the left.*)

ALDRID (*leaning on the back of his desk chair*)

You needn't get me any dinner.

(*She stops and looks back at him.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Why not?

ALDRID

Because I don't want any.

MRS. ALDRID

Don't you want anything at all?

ALDRID (*turning sharply, and looking at her*)

Yes! (*Starting across towards the back of the center table, and indicating the departed MRS. HAMPTON with a wide gesture.*) I want to know whether or not you intend to return that woman's property?

MRS. ALDRID

Her property?

ALDRID (*enraged, and lifting his voice*)
You heard me!

MRS. ALDRID (*lifting her hand to silence him*)
Sh—sh!

ALDRID (*disregarding her gesture*)
I want an answer, yes or no!

MRS. ALDRID (*flinging her apron back on to the sofa, and stepping up very close to him*)
What's the matter with you, Gene, are you blind?

ALDRID (*stonily*)
Not now; but I'm beginning to think I *have* been—terribly blind.

MRS. ALDRID (*turning away from him, and taking a couple of steps to the left*)
Well, I'm glad something has happened to open your eyes. (*She feigns to be occupied with her right cuff. ALDRID crosses to her rigidly, and, seizing her by the arms, turns her sharply to him and looks knowingly into her eyes.*)

ALDRID (*after a pause*)
If my eyes are not opened after this, it isn't your fault. (*She attempts to move, but he pins her to his side with another quick grip. She shows a trace of fright.*) I want to know whether or not you intend to return that money?

MRS. ALDRID (*with a mingling of fright and conciliation*)
When I find the owner, yes!

ALDRID (*breaking from her in a wrath, and going towards the back of the room*)
Ah! more hedging!
(*Speaking together—*)

ALDRID (*turning at the back of the room, and coming forward again*)
God! how I hate that attitude!

MRS. ALDRID (*holding her right upper arm as though he had hurt her*)

I'd like to hand over four hundred dollars to every Tom, Dick, and Harry that says he lost it. You must think I'm a—

ALDRID (*whirling fiercely upon her, as he passes in front of the center table*)

Please! (*She is instantly silenced.*) Don't drive me out of the house!

(*He goes blindly up towards the hallway.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*regaining herself, and half crying*)

What do you think I am—some schoolgirl!

ALDRID (*stopping abruptly just inside the archway*)

No! (*Turning to her.*) I think you're a thief!

MRS. ALDRID (*freezing with resentment*)

Do you, really?

ALDRID

More contemptible than the out-and-outer, for he at least doesn't try to justify himself.

MRS. ALDRID

And I'm not trying to justify myself, either.

ALDRID

You couldn't. There is no justification for your attitude.

MRS. ALDRID

There doesn't need to be any.

ALDRID

And there isn't—among honest people!

MRS. ALDRID (*sarcastically*)

So you don't consider me honest?

ALDRID (*moving a little nearer to her*)

You're like a million other people in this world, honest, as long as you don't *lose* anything by it; but as soon as you see where the principle of honesty is going to *cost* you a dollar, you begin to *hedge*!—just as you've been doing in this.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

I've been doing nothing of the kind!

ALDRID (*bitterly*)

You've been *tinkering* with honesty.

MRS. ALDRID (*advancing a step or two towards him*)

I never took a cent in my life that didn't belong to me!

ALDRID

There are rafts of people can say that. But they wouldn't walk back a block to return ten cents overchange that some clerk has given them. (*She sniffs contemptuously, and turns away.*) Pat themselves on the back, as I've heard you do—when the conductor on the trolley doesn't ask them for their carfare!

(*He swings down towards his desk.*)

MRS. ALDRID

The trolley companies have enough!

ALDRID

There you are! (*Turning to her.*) That's the psychology of a thief!

(*He goes up to the French window at the back of the room, and, after glancing out to see that no one has heard them, closes it.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*ready to cry with madness*)

Have I ever stolen anything from you? (*Evidently, he doesn't hear her, and starts back down towards the right of the center table. She advances a bit towards him.*)

Have I?

ALDRID (*stopping on a line with her, and looking at her witheringly*)

Now, don't start that, please.

(*He continues on down to the right of the center table, and stands, leaning upon it.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*stepping to the left of the center table, and striking her fist upon it*)

Answer me! Have I ever stolen anything from you!

(There is a slight pause; then he sits down on the edge of the table—very wearily—as though weighted with the conviction of having married an inferior woman.)

ALDRID *(with a complete change of tone)*

Listen to me! *(He takes his left hand in his right, and looks at the back of it, with a kind of vacant curiosity; then he drops his clasped hands on to his leg and looks up and out and away off.)* A man's home, in the majority of cases, is founded upon his belief in the honesty of his wife; you've stolen that from me to-night.

MRS. ALDRID

What?

ALDRID

That belief—that I had in you, as an honest woman. *(With an impatient toss of her head, she crosses over in front of the table to the desk, and straightens the desk pad; then stands with her back to him, with one hand resting on the back of the desk chair, and the other on her hip.)* You know, there's a line in a book somewhere that says:

"What a little thing makes the world go wrong!

A word too short, or a smile too long:

Then comes the mist, and the blinding rain,

And life is never the same again."

Your—*(he feels for the word)* attitude—in this affair to-night is that mist and blinding rain: it has shown me that my wife is not *strictly* honest—for the sake of being so; and honesty is such a passion with me that, as far as you are concerned, life will never be the same again; because I could never—absolutely *trust* you again. *(He rises slowly, and moves around in from the table.)* Never. *(He continues to the window at the back, then stops and turns to her.)* I'm very sorry we found that out—*(He steps into the window alcove and quietly pushes the window open; then, after glancing out, he leans against the side of the window alcove and says, half to himself and half to her—)* I'm sorrier—than if I had lost a million dollars.

FINDERS-KEEPERS

(There is a rather long stillness; then MRS. ALDRID, who has been finding it difficult to encompass the situation, abandons the effort and crosses the room towards the door at the left.)

MRS. ALDRID *(as she turns and starts across the room)*
Well, Gene, if you hadn't been so strictly honest all your life, we might have had a million dollars now.

ALDRID *(picking her up)*
Very true; but we'd have gotten it the way you are getting that four hundred.

MRS. ALDRID *(about to leave the room, and with a return to her former manner)*
And the way I'm going to hold on to it, incidentally.
(She starts to go out at the left.)

ALDRID *(in a sudden rage, and seizing the telephone at his right)*
All right! Listen to this! Wait! *(She stops, and turns to him.)* I want you to hear this! *(He works the telephone hook violently.)* Give me Wayne one—three seven—D.—Wayne. Please? *(She recognizes the number, evidently, and takes a couple of frantic steps towards him; but he meets her startled expression with a look of quiet defiance, so she stops dead and turns away, waiting.)* Hello! Hello? *(He lowers the telephone again, and there is another pause: then, suddenly, he is answered.)* Hello! —Mrs. Hampton?—Is this Mrs. Hampton?—Mr. Aldrid. *(MRS. ALDRID turns, and their eyes meet.)* I have some very good news for you.

MRS. ALDRID *(advancing in a panic)*
If you tell her I found that money, I'll deny it!

ALDRID *(into the telephone, and bitterly)*
Your money has been found!

MRS. ALDRID *(raising her arms and hands helplessly, and turning to the center table)*
Oh, you silly fool!

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

I found it.

MRS. ALDRID (*looking frantically among her parcels on the center table*)

Well, if you did, you'll pay it!

ALDRID (*into the telephone, and half smiling*)

I wanted to give you a lesson.

MRS. ALDRID

For I'm very sure I won't! (*Glancing under the center table.*) Where's my pocketbook?

(*She hurries over to the desk and looks.*)

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

I know, but I imagine you must be rather careless to drop that much money.

MRS. ALDRID (*hurrying back to the table, and becoming more excited every minute*)

Where's my pocketbook?

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

All right, Mrs. Hampton, come ahead—it's here for you.

(*He hangs up, and sets down the telephone.*)

MRS. ALDRID (*turning to him excitedly*)

Listen! Have you seen anything of my pocketbook?

ALDRID

No.

MRS. ALDRID (*looking among her parcels again, breathlessly*)

I can't find it!

ALDRID

Where'd you have it?

MRS. ALDRID

Right here among these parcels!

ALDRID (*disinterestedly*)

I haven't seen anything of it.

(*He comes down to his desk.*)

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

My God! I wonder if I've lost that! (*She looks again for a second, then stops dead and taps the table as though she has suddenly come to a conclusion.*) I wonder if *she* could have taken that—

ALDRID (*turning to her*)

Who?

MRS. ALDRID

Mrs. Hampton.

ALDRID

I'll ask her that—when she comes over.

MRS. ALDRID

Don't you dare!

ALDRID (*bitterly*)

Hum-hum.

(*He shakes his head from side to side.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Well, it's gone!

ALDRID

Maybe you left it in the trolley car.

MRS. ALDRID

Oh, wouldn't that be awful!—And that four hundred dollars is in it! (ALDRID *gives a short, dry sound of amusement, and, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, starts across the room towards the left.*) I don't see anything to laugh at! (*He throws his head back and makes another little sound of intensely derisive laughter.*) And twenty-six dollars of my own! (*He laughs again.*) God! what's the matter with me!

ALDRID (*turning in front of the sofa*)

Maybe you dropped it out there in the hallway.

MRS. ALDRID

Call up the Rapid Transit "Lost and Found," and see if

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

a lady's pocketbook has been turned in. I'll look out here.

(She vanishes into the hallway at the right. ALDRID stands still for a second, then picks up the telephone.)

ALDRID *(into the telephone)*

Information, please. *(To MRS. ALDRID.)* Do you see anything of it?

MRS. ALDRID *(in the hallway)*

Not a sign!

ALDRID

Why don't you light that light? *(He stands looking into the hallway until a light is turned on; then into the telephone.)* Hello? Information? What is the number of the Rapid Transit "Lost and Found"? Yes. Kensington one three—hundred? Will you ask the operator to ring it, please? If you please?

(He lowers the telephone, and MRS. ALDRID appears at the entrance to the hallway, searching frantically. ALDRID laughs dryly.)

MRS. ALDRID *(glancing up)*

Funny, isn't it!

(She disappears again into the hallway, and immediately there is the sound of a chair being knocked over, as though she had flung it aside in her anger. ALDRID looks sharply toward the hallway, then shakes his head slowly and conclusively.)

ALDRID *(shifting his attitude, and sighing rather wearily)*

Ha, ho-ho—*(Into the telephone.)* Hello? Information? *(He glances toward the hallway.)* Oh, this is "Lost and Found"? I'd like to know whether or not a lady's pocketbook has been turned in there this evening?

MRS. ALDRID *(rushing in from the hallway)*

Oh, it isn't out there! What do they say?

(He silences her with a gesture; then, after a slight pause, speaks suddenly into the telephone again.)

FINDERS-KEEPERS

ALDRID

This minute?

MRS. ALDRID

It *has* been turned in?

ALDRID (*to her*)

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID (*turning and sinking on to the chair at her hand*)

Oh, thank God!

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

No, my wife did.

MRS. ALDRID (*turning to him*)

A regular, lady's, black leather pocketbook!

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

Well, can you wait a minute? Please? (*To MRS. ALDRID.*)

They want to know whether or not you can identify this?

MRS. ALDRID (*impatiently*)

Oh, certainly I can! It's a regular, lady's black leather pocketbook, with my initials E. A. on the outside!

ALDRID

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID (*illustrating with her hands*)

There's a small, gold mesh purse inside, with four hundred dollars in it; and, in the side pocket, there are twenty-six dollars. Then, there's—

ALDRID (*to MRS. ALDRID*)

Wait a minute. (*Into the telephone.*) Hello!

MRS. ALDRID

A gold mesh purse, with—

ALDRID (*to MRS. ALDRID*)

Wait a minute. (*Into the telephone.*) A lady's black leather pocketbook, with the initials, E. A., on the outside.

There's a gold—E. A. No, no, no, no! E!—Yes—Well, that's right. Why—
(*He looks at his wife.*)

MRS. ALDRID

A gold mesh purse—

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

A gold mesh purse, with four hundred dollars in it; and in the side pocket there are twenty-six dollars—of her own.
(*MRS. ALDRID looks at him suddenly.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Five fives and a one.

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

In bills, yes. (*He looks at her, and she nods confirmation.*)
Five fives and a one. One minute. (*To his wife.*) What else?—quick!

MRS. ALDRID (*becoming very nervous*)

Why, there's a silver vanity case—

ALDRID

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID

And a gold bracelet—with the clasp broken—(*He makes a movement of interruption, but she continues*) and a tax receipt, and a—

(*ALDRID and MRS. ALDRID, speaking together—*)

ALDRID (*to MRS. ALDRID*)

Wait a minute, now, till I get that! (*Into the telephone.*)
Hello?

MRS. ALDRID

Sample of Georgette crêpe, and a face veil, and a handkerchief, and two packages of hairpins, and—

ALDRID (*to MRS. ALDRID*)

I can't remember all those! (*She stops, and relaxes; then he speaks into the telephone.*) Hello! There's a silver vanity case and a bracelet—

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

Broken!

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

Broken!—A broken bracelet. (*With a touch of annoyance.*) The bracelet is broken. Yes. And there's a—(*He stops gradually and listens attentively—his eyes wandering to his wife's.*) I see.

MRS. ALDRID (*rising slowly and apprehensively*)

What is it?

ALDRID (*silencing her with a deft gesture, and continuing into the telephone*)

Why, yes, that is rather funny.

MRS. ALDRID (*impatiently*)

What does he say?

ALDRID (*into the telephone*)

How about to-morrow afternoon? No, no, I'll call for it myself. Well, if you will, please? Tha—nk you, very much. Thanks.

(*He sets the telephone down.*)

MRS. ALDRID

Is everything all right?

ALDRID

Yes.

MRS. ALDRID (*sighing with relief, and leaning upon the center table*)

Oh!—can you imagine if I'd lost that!

ALDRID (*coming down thoughtfully towards his desk*)

Everything but the money.

MRS. ALDRID (*turning and looking at him*)

What'd you say?

ALDRID (*without meeting her eye*)

He says that, evidently, the person who found your pocket-book took all the money out of it before turning it in.

MRS. ALDRID (*aghast*)
What!

ALDRID (*indifferently, and turning to his desk*)
That's what he says.

MRS. ALDRID (*morally and physically indignant*)
Can you imagine anybody being that contemptible!

ALDRID (*turning and going up to the archway*)
Please, don't make me laugh—I'm not in the mood.

MRS. ALDRID
You won't laugh when you have to pay that woman four hundred dollars out of your own pocket!

ALDRID (*turning to her sharply*)
I'd have had to do that anyway!— There didn't seem to be very much chance of getting it away from you!

MRS. ALDRID
Well, you're not going to give her four hundred dollars of your *own* money?

ALDRID
That'll do! And, when she comes here, don't make it necessary for me to tell her who *found* her money. Now, be wise. (*He looks out the hallway, starts slightly, then steps quickly towards his desk.*) Where is that gold mesh purse of yours?

MRS. ALDRID
There in that drawer—what are you going to do?

ALDRID (*speaking directly to her in a level tone*)
I'm going to give you a lesson in honesty. Where is it?
(*He opens the middle drawer of his desk.*)

MRS. ALDRID
Right where you're looking: what do you want it for?

ALDRID (*whipping a little gold mesh purse out of the drawer*)
Never mind! Is this it?

FINDERS-KEEPERS

MRS. ALDRID

Yes; what are you going to do?

(He slams the drawer shut, and, simultaneously, there is a sharp ring at the front door. He lays his hand on MRS. ALDRID'S arm, and they stand still for a second.)

ALDRID

There she is. *(Then turning and urging MRS. ALDRID across in front of the center table towards the door at the left.)* Go up to my money box and get me eight fifty-dollar bills—the newest you can find; and, hurry!

(He starts back towards the archway.)

MRS. ALDRID *(recovering herself)*

I'll do nothing of the kind!

ALDRID *(whirling upon her, and indicating the left door with an imperative gesture)*

Quick! Now, you've lost enough to-night, I think!

MRS. ALDRID *(turns and goes to the left door, then stops again, defiantly)*

I will not!

ALDRID

Very well, then; I shall be obliged to tell this woman the particulars.

MRS. ALDRID *(bitterly)*

Oh, I'll get them! But I never knew, Gene, that you were such a fool!

(She starts to leave the room.)

ALDRID

Wait! *(She stops and looks at him.)* Wait a minute. *(He starts across towards her, passing back of the center table.)* I'll get them myself.

MRS. ALDRID

Why can't I get them?

ALDRID *(looking at her steadily as he passes above her and out the door)*

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

Because I'd rather get them myself.

(She stands very still, realizing the implication, until the doorbell has rung three times; then with a rather slow, general gesture of sullenness and defeat, she moves up and across towards the archway to answer the door.)

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS SLOWLY

APARTMENTS TO LET

A COMEDY OF MODERN LIFE

by ELLIOTT NUGENT AND HOWARD LINDSAY

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APARTMENTS TO LET

"Apartments To Let" is a farce written especially for vaudeville audiences, and in order to get the best out of it, it should be performed with the broad strokes and rapid tempo characteristic of that form of entertainment. The comedy of the sketch depends mostly upon the actor who plays the rôle of Horace Green. He should be a large man, and his portrayal of the unfortunate husband should carry with it a sense of his utter inability to cope with the clever sisters. In casting the other parts care should be taken to provide as great a contrast as possible. Mrs. Green should be portrayed as commonplace and unpleasantly efficient, while Laurel should be quite attractive: Horace's idea of a beautiful woman. In this way you heighten the plausibility—and incidentally the comedy—of the husband's falling into temptation.

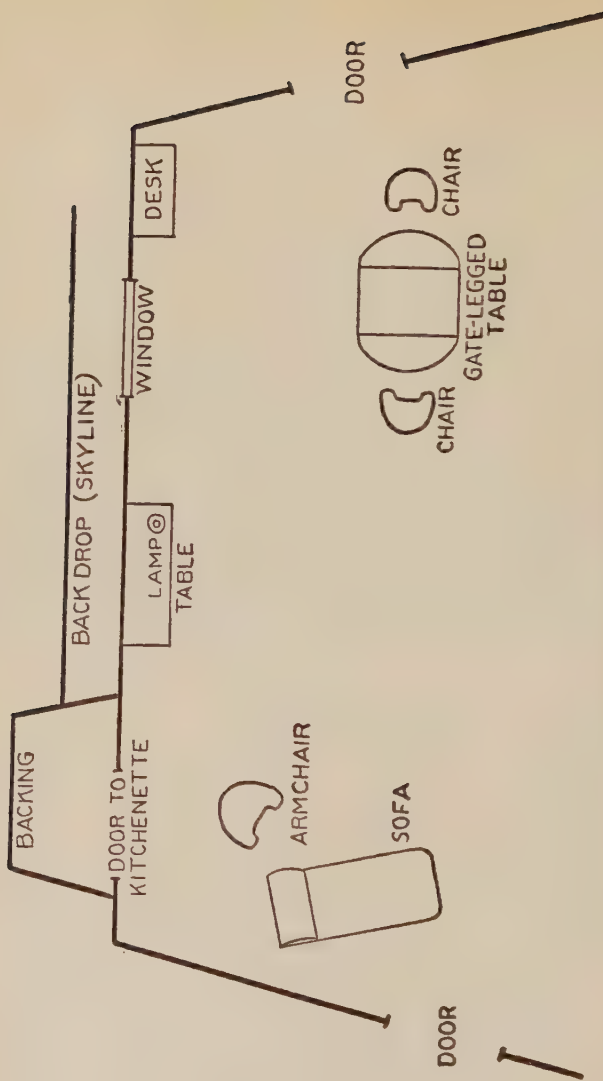
PROPERTY LIST

FOR VERA

- Two leases
- Newspaper
- Pen and ink

FOR MR. GREEN

- Umbrella



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "APARTMENTS TO LET"

APARTMENTS TO LET

CHARACTERS

VERA BLAKE

LAUREL BRANCH, *her sister, a widow*

HORACE GREEN

CLARISSE GREEN, *his wife*

SCENE: *The living room of a Park Avenue apartment*

There is an open arch L, a door down R, another door (to the kitchenette) R of UC, a window with the shade drawn UC. A gate-legged table is LC, a chair on either side of it. A sofa runs straight up and down stage R, an armchair at its L facing into it. There is a small table with a lamp UC between the window and the kitchenette door, desk L of window.

TIME: *Any afternoon*

At rise of the curtain VERA enters from R carrying two leases, when she gets C, telephone bell rings off R.

VERA

Laurel dear, will you answer the telephone?

LAUREL (*off stage*)

Yes. Have them come right up. (*VERA has turned lamp on at UC, goes to desk UL, puts leases away, comes down L surveying apartment. Enter LAUREL.*) Those people who are coming to look at the apartment are on their way up. (*Coming RC.*) I hope my negligee won't frighten them. How do I look?

VERA

Lovely, dear.

LAUREL

I do hope we can get this apartment off our hands to-day.

VERA

Well, do your very best.

(VERA *picks up newspaper from chair LC and folds it.*)

LAUREL (*arranging cushions on sofa R*)

Don't worry, I will. It's the worst arranged apartment I've ever seen. Two hundred and fifty a month, unfurnished, is ridiculous for this place.

VERA

Yes, landlords have no heart at all— They ought to be ashamed of themselves. Two hundred and fifty for this. We'll have to get at least five hundred.

(VERA *takes paper to wastebasket by desk.*)

LAUREL

Five hundred. We'll be lucky—

(*Going up toward VERA.*)

VERA (*turning back to LAUREL*)

Well, people can't expect to get apartments for nothing. (*The doorbell sounds off stage.*) There they are. You answer the bell. That negligee so helps to furnish the apartment. (*She goes DR.*) And remember, the husband is coming, too.

LAUREL

I'll look them over, dear.

VERA

Good. I'll slip into the bedroom, and if they look like five hundred, call me.

(*She exits R. LAUREL exits L.*)

MRS. GREEN (*off stage*)

Is this Miss Blake's apartment?

LAUREL (*off stage*)

Yes, are you Mr. and Mrs. Green?

MRS. GREEN (*entering and coming down and across to LC*)

Yes, I am Mrs. Green.

(GREEN *enters and Xes above to RC, looking the apart-*

APARTMENTS TO LET

ment over, his back toward his wife. He carries an umbrella. Enter LAUREL, comes DL.)

LAUREL

It was I who spoke to you on the 'phone. I am Mrs. Branch—Miss Blake's sister.

MRS. GREEN

How do you do? My husband—(*She reaches for GREEN's arm, misses, reaches again, and pulls him around sharply.*) My husband!

LAUREL (*Xing to him and extending her hand*)

How do you do?

(*GREEN, disconcerted, extends his right hand, which is holding his hat. LAUREL takes hat, shakes hands with him and returns the hat.*)

GREEN (*feeling he must say something*)

Yes, indeed.

LAUREL (*to MRS. GREEN*)

Did I keep you waiting very long?

MRS. GREEN (*with gestures*)

Not nearly long enough! There was some one in another apartment singing divinely.

LAUREL

That must have been Madame Corelli.

MRS. GREEN

Corelli? Yes, it was Corelli. You know I just live at the opera. I thought I recognized her voice.

GREEN

It was a man's voice.

MRS. GREEN

Horace, there's no sex in art.

LAUREL (*to the rescue*)

It may have been Columbari.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MRS. GREEN

Columbari! Oh, does he live here?

LAUREL

Yes—Columbari—Corelli—Marietta—the house is filled with opera people.

MRS. GREEN (*with enthusiasm*)

I know I'm going to like this apartment.

GREEN

What's the rent?

LAUREL (*giving them each a swift glance of appraisal*)

My sister will have to discuss that. (*She decides they look like five hundred.*) I'll call her. (LAUREL *Xes* GREEN to his R, then turns.) Will you excuse me? (*She looks at GREEN, is startled, her hand reaches out toward him.*) Oh! Oh!

GREEN

What's the matter?

LAUREL (*getting control of herself*)

Oh—it's only that—nothing—nothing at all. Excuse me. (*She exits.* MRS. GREEN *Xes* to HORACE, turns him around and looks him over.)

MRS. GREEN (*sharply*)

What did she look at you like that for?

GREEN (*defensively*)

How do I know?

MRS. GREEN

Well, it was very strange.

GREEN

Now listen—I never saw *that* woman before. (MRS. GREEN *turns away* L.) I don't like this place.

MRS. GREEN

I do. (*Singing it.*) I think the apartment is charming.

APARTMENTS TO LET

(*Her voice breaks.*) My voice is tired—tramping around; the places you've dragged me to.

(*She sits L of the gate-legged table.*)

GREEN

I've dragged you!

MRS. GREEN

Ssh! Pianissimo! Pianissimo!

GREEN

I wanted to take that first place—the one on Fifty-seventh Street. It had a fireplace and a nice big kitchen.

MRS. GREEN

We can't live in the kitchen.

GREEN

Well, I'm tired of eating chops off an electric grill—dragging out a gate-legged table for every meal, keeping silverware in my desk drawer and the dishes in the Victrola.

(*GREEN's voice has become very loud.*)

MRS. GREEN

Ssh!

GREEN (*lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper*)

And washing the dishes in the bathtub. Now that place on West Fifty-seventh Street—at one hundred and fifty.

MRS. GREEN (*she gives a short trill*)

Yes—a smart address—why, I'd be ashamed to taxi there. (*MRS. GREEN trills through the rest of GREEN's speech.*)

GREEN

Clarisse, nothing would keep you from taking a taxi. You only like this place because the address is Park Avenue—why, the entrance is halfway to Madison. The only part of this building that's on Park Avenue is the rent.

MRS. GREEN (*singing it*)

She hasn't quoted the rent yet.

GREEN (*singing it*)

Never mind—I can see it in their eyes. (*Speaking.*) You

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

think because I've come heir to eight thousand you've got to live on Park Avenue. But remember—I won't take this if it's over one hundred and fifty—and unless it has a nice, big—

MRS. GREEN

Ssh!

GREEN

Kitchen!

VERA (*off R*)

Yes, dear, I will.

MRS. GREEN (*rising*)

Now let me do the talking. (VERA *enters R*. MRS. GREEN *Xes to her*.) How do you do?

VERA

How do you do? I am Miss Blake.

MRS. GREEN (*indicating GREEN*)

My husband.

VERA (VERA *Xes to GREEN—extending her hand*)

How do you do? (GREEN *again raises his hand with the hat in it, notices hat, turns and puts it down on gate-legged table, turns back with hand extended, but VERA has turned to MRS. GREEN.*) I'm sorry we haven't had time this morning to straighten up the apartment.

MRS. GREEN

I think it's lovely.

GREEN

Oh, that's all right—we can see what it would look like if it was fixed up.

(MRS. GREEN *clears her throat at HORACE*; VERA *looks at her; she changes it into a sneeze.*)

VERA

Won't you sit down? It's so tiring looking for an apartment. (MRS. GREEN *smiles and sits down on sofa.*) You'll find that a very comfortable chair, Mr. Green.

APARTMENTS TO LET

GREEN (*grunting, sits down L of table*)

Yes, indeed, I am glad to rest my tired feet.

(GREEN settles back. VERA sits R of table. LAUREL enters)

LAUREL

Well, is it all settled?

MRS. GREEN (*signaling GREEN to rise*)

Horace!

(GREEN immediately rises and stands wearily.)

LAUREL

I know you'll like the apartment.

MRS. GREEN (*to LAUREL*)

Oh, I'm sure we will. (*To VERA.*) Such distinguished people in the building.

(VERA flashes a look of inquiry to LAUREL who Xes to C.)

LAUREL

I was telling Mrs. Green about some of the other tenants—the opera singers.

(LAUREL sits in armchair LC.)

VERA (*catching on immediately*)

Oh, are you musical?

MRS. GREEN (*starting to boast*)

Am I musical—(*Then deprecatingly.*) Musical—

GREEN (*very proudly*)

Why, my wife can tell you what's on the other side of any record. (MRS. GREEN clears her throat at HORACE, then sneezes. HORACE rises wondering where he went wrong, changes the subject.) Now, about the rent— How much—?

VERA (*not ready to spring the price*)

How many rooms? Five—and that doesn't include the hall.

GREEN (*pleased*)

Five? Oh, you've got a dining room then?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

VERA

Oh, yes—this is our living and dining room. You can put eight people at that gate-legged table.

(HORACE *steps away from the table to L—quickly.*)

MRS. GREEN

I love gate-legged tables—they're so different.

VERA (*going to the table*)

I'll show you how it works.

GREEN

You don't need to.

MRS. GREEN (*giving HORACE a dirty look*)

Have you a large bedroom? I do need a large bedroom.

LAUREL

Well, you can *see* it.

GREEN

That's more than you can say for some of them.

VERA

She means we'll be glad to show you the apartment. It's very well arranged.

LAUREL

Yes, I was just saying to my sister, that this is one of the best laid out apartments I have ever seen.

GREEN

In the midst of life we are in death. (CLARISSE *business. Stepping in front of table.*) I was going to ask you how much rent— (*Buzzer sounds off R. He discovers he is stepping on it, tries it out again to make sure.*) What's that?

VERA

Oh, that's the floor buzzer to call the maid.

GREEN

Maid?

APARTMENTS TO LET

MRS. GREEN

Yes—just what are the five rooms, Miss Blake—that sounds like a lot to take care of.

VERA

You see, there's a maid service in this building—that's twenty dollars a month more.

GREEN

More than what?

VERA

More than worth it—it saves so much trouble.

MRS. GREEN

That's good.

LAUREL

We have restaurant service, too.

GREEN

We don't need that if there's a good kitchen.

VERA

Oh, yes, of course—but we have most of our meals sent up—my poor sister here has had a great loss.

GREEN (*sympathetically*)

Oil?

LAUREL (*rises; a little tearfully*)

No—my husband.

(*LAUREL turns up to window.*)

GREEN

Oh—I was afraid— (*MRS. GREEN coughs and sneezes.*)

I mean that's too bad.

MRS. GREEN (*glancing at GREEN*)

Yes, it is—sometimes.

GREEN

Speaking of great losses, what did you say the rent was?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

VERA (*Xing to door R*)

Well—there's this room, and then the dressing room—then the bedroom and off that the bathroom.

MRS. GREEN

Oh, I'm so glad there's a dressing room. We can keep our things separate, Horace.

GREEN

Yes, indeed.

MRS. GREEN

I'll use the dressing room.

GREEN

I'll dress in the bathroom.

(HORACE *turns L.*)

VERA

There's a lovely closet in the hall. Your husband could use that.

LAUREL

Mr. Green, let me show you the hall closet.

GREEN

Well, I'll take a look at it.

(*Exit LAUREL and GREEN L.*)

MRS. GREEN (*after a trill*)

Does one get to know the musicians in the building?

(*They sit, MRS. GREEN RC, VERA on the sofa.*)

VERA

We're just like one big family in this building. Señor Columbari was saying to me only yesterday—"I do hope you'll sublet to music lovers."

(MRS. GREEN *trills in ecstasy, then her voice breaks.*)

MRS. GREEN (*feeling her throat*)

I must save it.

VERA

Yes, do. (*Looks at wrist watch.*) It's a little early for Columbari now.

APARTMENTS TO LET

MRS. GREEN

Oh, do you expect *him here?*

VERA

No, but he practises every day at five. You can hear him through that window so plainly.

MRS. GREEN

How divine!

(GREEN and LAUREL enter L. GREEN has entered first and down to in front of table. LAUREL has gone above to UC.)

LAUREL (*meltingly*)

Oh—you'll like this bathroom, Mr. Green—it's all white tile.

GREEN

Oh, it is? (*Conciliating a bit.*) Well—has it got a shower?

VERA

Oh, yes—you just attach it to the faucet.

GREEN (*defiantly*)

Who does?

LAUREL (*stepping R—above*)

Oh—it works.

GREEN (*surprised*)

Honestly? Can *you* use those darn things?

LAUREL (*coming down above sofa to door R*)

Oh, Mr. Green, let me show you how *I* use the shower.
(*As he starts, MRS. GREEN springs up to intercept him.*)

MRS. GREEN

Never mind that, Horace. (*She turns back to VERA.*)
So you count the bathroom as a room?

VERA

Of course—*bathroom—bathroom.*

(*She laughs. MRS. GREEN joins in with a laugh that quickly dies.*)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GREEN

Well, now—about the rent.

VERA

Of course we're subletting, you know—these are all our own things. You'll find everything you need.

GREEN

Have you plenty of cooking utensils, and dishes and things?

LAUREL

Oh, we have a lovely tea set.

MRS. GREEN

Enchanting! And Columbari practises at five. I can give musical teas.

GREEN (*impatiently*)

What have you got that you eat dinner with?

VERA (*brightly*)

Well—there's the tea set—and some other dishes—

LAUREL

Of course, we can see you are not the sort of people that will bother much with cooking.

MRS. GREEN (*eagerly*)

No!

GREEN

Yes.

VERA

Oh, do *you* cook?

GREEN

No! Yes—no—but I would like to *see* the kitchen.

VERA

Certainly. I'll show it to you.

(*She moves to door of kitchenette up R. He follows her, she swings open the door.*)

MRS. GREEN

Oh—it's a kitchenette.

APARTMENTS TO LET

GREEN

My God—an electric grill!
(*He is now just L of the sofa.*)

VERA (*closing the door quickly and going to Mrs. Green*
UC)

Do you know how they work, Mrs. Green?

GREEN

She's an expert.

MRS. GREEN

Just what is the rental, Miss Blake?

VERA (*politely*)

Well, of course, we are not trying to make anything on it
—we just want to feel that we have the right sort of
people using our things. We'll let it go for just what we
pay for it unfurnished, shall we, dear?

LAUREL

Yes.

MRS. GREEN

Oh, that is nice of you.

GREEN

Yeh—that's fair enough.

VERA

Of course, you'll have the usual telephone charges, the
gas, the electricity and service charges—but the *heat* is
furnished. And that makes the rental only five hundred.

GREEN (*stunned*)

Five hundred! Oh!

MRS. GREEN (*after a pause*)

Well the *heat* is furnished.

(*The two sisters feel that things are slipping a bit.*)

LAUREL (*suddenly*)

There it is—don't move, Mr. Green!

GREEN

I can't.

LAUREL

Look at Mr. Green, Vera.

(VERA comes down and looks at him.)

GREEN

Oh, I'll be all right in a minute.

LAUREL

Don't you see—that expression—why he's Jack all over.

GREEN (*sadly*)

I'd have to be to take this place.

VERA (*looking at him hard*)

Yes, dear—he *does* look like Jack. Of course, he's a stronger man than Jack. (*To MRS. GREEN, who is wondering what it's all about.*) Poor Jack was never very strong.

LAUREL

But he has that same distinction—that far-away look.

VERA

Of course, he has more color.

LAUREL

No, he looks just as dear Jack looked in his coffin.
(*She wipes away a tear.*)

GREEN (*nervously*)

I tell you I'll be all right in a minute.

VERA

Jack was my sister's husband.

MRS. GREEN

How sad. You say Horace looks like your sister's dead husband?

LAUREL

He did—for a moment.

APARTMENTS TO LET

GREEN

That was just after she mentioned the rent. Well, I'm all right now. (GREEN *pulls himself together and goes L to table where his hat is.*) I think we had better meet that man over on Fifty-seventh Street now, dear—we'll get in touch with you later, Miss—

VERA

Oh, but you mustn't go without seeing the rest of the apartment— (*Going R.*) You haven't seen the bedroom—

GREEN

I saw the kitchenette!

MRS. GREEN

But we should see all of it, Harry.

LAUREL (*who has gone up L and behind chair RC*)

It won't take long.

MRS. GREEN

No. (*Going R.*) Come, Horace.

GREEN

You look at it—I'll stay here and recover.

(*He sinks into comfortable chair L of table.*)

VERA

This way, Mrs. Green.

(*MRS. GREEN follows VERA off R.*)

MRS. GREEN (*just outside*)

Oh, so this is the dressing room?

VERA (*immediately*)

Yes, and this is the bedroom.

LAUREL (*looking at GREEN mysteriously and sitting in chair L of table*)

You're not by any chance a Branch are you?

GREEN (*puzzled*)

A branch of what?

LAUREL

A branch of the Branches?

GREEN (*worried*)

I don't think my hearing is very good to-day.

LAUREL

I mean—you see, my husband's name was Branch.

GREEN

Oh, my name is Green.

LAUREL

Mine is Laurel.

GREEN

Oh—that's a pretty name—Laurel Branch, eh? Ha-ha—
Laurel Branch—that's pretty good! Did any one ever call
that to your attention?

LAUREL

Yes, poor Jack used to speak of it. You're so much like
Jack.

GREEN

I look like him, eh?

LAUREL

Oh, it's not only that. You *are* like him. I can feel it—
there's something about your face. (GREEN *feels of his*
face.) A something sensitive, poetic. I'm not wrong, am
I, Mr. Green? There is poetry in your nature?

GREEN (*heavily*)

Well, now that's funny. That's a side of me that very
few people see, my poetical side. My wife doesn't really
understand me.

LAUREL (*with great sympathy*)

She doesn't? If you're like Jack—and I'm sure you are—
that must be so cruel. I miss him so.

GREEN

Crying won't bring him back, Mrs. Laurel— Oh, that's
your first name. I'm sorry.

APARTMENTS TO LET

(GREEN has extended his arm toward her across the table.)

LAUREL

Oh, don't regret it. It sounded so sweet to hear you call me Laurel.

(Her hand almost accidentally falls over GREEN's, then she swings it away, brushing across his hand.)

GREEN

Oh, did it?

(LAUREL continues a vague brushing of the table. As GREEN sees her hand starting toward him, he starts to put his hand over hers, looking away at the same time to make it appear an accident, but LAUREL's hand starts a return journey just too soon and GREEN's hand finds nothing but the table. His expression changes from sly hope to disappointment.)

LAUREL

Yes, just like Jack. (Same hand business.) I can't believe you are just a stranger. (Same hand business.) Can't feel toward you like—just Mr. Green. (Same hand business.)

GREEN (this time getting her hand beneath his)
My first name's Horace.

LAUREL

Horace?

GREEN

Laurel. (Enter MRS. GREEN and VERA. They withdraw their hands hastily.) Yes, indeed, Mrs. Branch.

LAUREL (taking her cue)

How true that is, Mr. Green.

MRS. GREEN

It's rather small, isn't it?

VERA (*below couch*)

Well, that's what makes the bedroom so *convenient*; you're no sooner out of the bed than you're into the bath.

MRS. GREEN

I don't see how you ever got that bed in there. It's not a very large apartment—for five hundred dollars.

LAUREL (*rising*)

Oh, didn't you like the bedroom?

VERA

Well, Laurel dear, perhaps Mrs. Green is looking for something much—less expensive.

(GREEN *rises*.)

MRS. GREEN (*on her dignity*)

Oh, no—not at all. Five hundred is not too much to pay—(GREEN *sits with a groan of dismay*)—for an apartment that's worth it.

GREEN

Five hundred dollars. I'd like to see an apartment worth five hundred dollars.

LAUREL (*meltingly*)

Let me show you one, Mr. Green.

(*She starts across above. GREEN starts to follow.*)

MRS. GREEN (*intercepting*)

That isn't necessary, Horace. I've seen it. (*To VERA.*) Is five hundred the best you can do?

VERA

Of course, the rents aren't cheap here, Mrs. Green. This is Park Avenue, you know. Perhaps you're looking in the wrong neighborhood?

LAUREL (*she has Xed above to behind chair L of table, sweetly*)

Where do you live now, Mr. Green?

GREEN

Over in Jer—

APARTMENTS TO LET

MRS. GREEN (*answering for him quickly*)

On Riverside Drive.

(*She attempts to caress GREEN, but turns it into a slap.*)

VERA (*politely depreciating*)

Oh—the *West* side. Yes, I've heard that it's very nice up there. But don't the trains annoy you with their dust and smoke?

MRS. GREEN

Not at all—we don't see them—we have a northern exposure.

VERA

Oh—well, you have a southern exposure here.

(*She goes up between chair and sofa to window UC.*

MRS. GREEN turns up to R of VERA.)

LAUREL (*to GREEN*)

The southern is so bright and sunny.

GREEN (*won by her smile*)

Oh, is it? (*Moving to the window.*) Well, let's have a look at it. (*VERA pulls up the shade.*) Oh, you're not on the Avenue!

LAUREL

Well, hardly—we're on the patio.

GREEN

The what?

VERA

The patio.

MRS. GREEN (*with a gesture of description*)

The patio!

GREEN (*repeating the gesture with a bluff of understanding*)

Oh, the patio!

VERA

The courtyard. Can you see our fountain, Mr. Green?

GREEN (*sticking his head out*)

I can't see anything.

VERA

Well, you shouldn't have come on this dark day—on a clear day the sun just streams in here.

(*Her streaming gesture almost hits MRS. GREEN.*)

GREEN (*looking from the window to VERA*)

Just streams in here? (*Cold.*) Well, I don't think we can decide on this apartment, Miss Blake.

MRS. GREEN

Horace!

GREEN (*coming down—the others follow him down*)

No, dear, I want to look at that Fifty-seventh Street place again.

MRS. GREEN

Horace!

GREEN

Hurry up, it's raining.

MRS. GREEN (*pleased*)

Oh—we'll have to call a taxi.

GREEN (*hastily*)

It isn't raining that much.

MRS. GREEN (*to recover the family prestige*)

Our car is in the repair shop just now.

LAUREL

What kind of a car have you, Mr. Green?

GREEN

Packard.

MRS. GREEN (*simultaneously*)

Pierce-Arrow.

VERA

Oh, it's too bad they're both in the repair shop.

APARTMENTS TO LET

MRS. GREEN

May my husband use your 'phone? (VERA *nods assent.*)

Get a cab, Horace.

(MRS. GREEN *turns up and R.*)

LAUREL (*starting R*)

Certainly. I'll show you, Mr. Green—it's in the bedroom.

MRS. GREEN (*hurrying to door R*)

Oh, I remember where it is—never mind, Horace.

(*She exits.*)

VERA (*following her off*)

The door man can call one—unless you insist on a Yellow.

(GREEN *has turned up to window studying the brick wall.*

LAUREL *goes to his side.*)

LAUREL (*looking at him sadly*)

I hope you won't think I'm foolish, but I hate to see you go.

GREEN (*uncomfortably*)

Well, I'm sorry we don't like the place—better, I mean.

LAUREL

It's not that—but somehow I should like to think of you here—standing by this window as Jack used to stand, looking at the fountain—

GREEN (*looking out, he bumps his head on the wall*)

I can't see anything but a brick wall. Where is that fountain?

LAUREL (*pointing vaguely off L—coming down and L*)

It's just around the corner—just as *you* will be in a minute—gone—out of my life—as he went.

(*She breaks down and sobs bitterly.*)

GREEN (*coming down towards her*)

Now, don't worry, Mrs.—er—Laurel—maybe he's better off?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

LAUREL (*her back is toward him*)

But I'm so alone—so—alone.

GREEN (*with a little pat on her shoulder*)

Don't cry, little woman.

LAUREL (*turning to him*)

You mustn't put your arm around me *that way*.

GREEN (*dropping his hand a bit*)

What way?

LAUREL (*puts his arm around her completely, holds it there*)

That way. No—no, you mustn't. It's too real—it seems as if Jack was holding me in his arms again—as if he were about to kiss me.

GREEN (*torn between eagerness and caution*)

Are you sure?

LAUREL (*holding up her lips to his—closes her eyes*)

Oh, don't—Don't.

(*He can't quite tell which kisses whom, but the result is a passionate embrace. During the embrace they step on the buzzer, which is heard off R, then VERA enters suddenly R.*)

VERA

Mr. Green!

GREEN

Oh, my God!

(*He drops LAUREL and turns UC.*)

LAUREL

Oh—I begged you not to—

(*Sinks sobbing into a chair L of table.*)

GREEN

What!!!

VERA (*in suppressed fury*)

How dare you take advantage of my sister? To play upon

APARTMENTS TO LET

your chance resemblance to her dead husband—and then attack her.

(She turns up and down stage by the sofa.)

GREEN *(following her—terror-stricken)*

Now, listen—this wasn't my fault.

LAUREL *(sobbing)*

Oh!

GREEN

Ssh!

VERA

How very contemptible.

GREEN

Ssh!

LAUREL

Oh!

GREEN

Ssh!

VERA

To try to blame her—this poor, grief-stricken child—who only asks men to let her alone—only tries to avoid them.

(She goes up and down again, GREEN pursuing her.)

GREEN *(in a hoarse whisper)*

Now, listen—I can explain this.

VERA *(with a menacing calm)*

Perhaps you can explain it to your wife—I'll call her!

(She starts R.)

GREEN *(terror-stricken)*

No, don't do that! Give me a chance. *(Gets a bright idea.)* You see, she'd fainted and I—

LAUREL

That's not true. That's not true!

VERA *(Xing to LAUREL)*

Why should I give you a chance? See what you've done

to her! And just when I was trying to get her away from this apartment with its bitter memories of her poor, dear husband.

GREEN (*another bright idea*)

Listen, I'll help you get her away. Let me take the apartment off your hands.

VERA (*calm indignation*)

Don't try to bribe us. Don't think you can settle this affair that way.

(*Enter MRS. GREEN—GREEN turns R toward her.*)

MRS. GREEN

I'm sorry to have been so long. I *finally* got the house operator. Come, Horace, we can wait for the cab downstairs.

(*She Xes GREEN, starting up through C.*)

VERA (*in a deadly tone*)

Don't go, Mrs. Green.

GREEN

No, don't go, Clarisse. (*With desperate joviality.*) I haven't signed the lease yet.

MRS. GREEN (*surprised, but pleased*)

Are you going to take the apartment?

GREEN

Yes, what is it—one year, Mrs. Blake?

LAUREL (*sobs out*)

Give him two years.

VERA

Two years, Mr. Green.

MRS. GREEN (*stepping toward table*)

Oh, what has happened to your sister?

VERA (*Xing MRS. GREEN to GREEN and giving him the full benefit of it*)

She has had an attack.

(*VERA turns up to the desk and gets the leases.*)

APARTMENTS TO LET

GREEN (*relying on sheer noise*)

Yes, yes, yes, yes. I think we'll be very happy in this apartment. (*As if explaining LAUREL's attack.*) Her husband died here. It should appeal to you very much, Clarisse. And there's restaurant service. You won't have to cook at all. And there's maid service. That'll save you from any work, dear.

MRS. GREEN (*with a bit of suspicion*)

What's come over you, Horace?

LAUREL (*sobbing*)

Jack and I were so happy here.

GREEN

That's it. She and I—er—she and Jack were so happy here.

VERA (*bringing the leases and a pen to table*)

Here are the leases, Mr. Green.

MRS. GREEN

I'm so relieved that it's all settled.

(*She sings the last two words and turns up to the windows.*)

GREEN

You don't know how relieved I am.

(*He Xes to table. As he approaches, LAUREL springs up with a smothered cry of terror and Xes to the sofa on which she sinks.*)

VERA

Sign here—

GREEN (*as he looks from leases to LAUREL*)

Two years—five hundred.

LAUREL (*with a sudden outburst of grief*)

What a price to pay. What a price to pay.

MRS. GREEN (*coming down to her*)

You must try to forget your grief, my dear.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GREEN

Yes—forget it.

(The phone rings off R.)

MRS. GREEN

Oh, that's the taxi.

LAUREL *(tearfully staggers off R)*

It's all right—I'll answer it.

VERA *(coming to MRS. GREEN RC)*

Occupancy on the first, Mrs. Green.

(Hands her copy of lease.)

MRS. GREEN *(Xing to above table)*

Well, I'm glad you're going to like it here, Horace.

VERA

Yes, I think this apartment will do your husband a *great deal of good*.

GREEN *(tearfully)*

It's done me good already.

(He exits. MRS. GREEN looks around happily.)

MRS. GREEN

In the heart of music?

VERA

Yes—we're letting it go for a song.

MRS. GREEN

Ah, yes—a song.

(She starts a happy trill, which breaks horribly on a high note. With an apologetic gesture toward her throat, she hurries off. VERA swiftly goes to door, looks after them.

LAUREL enters R and comes C.)

LAUREL

Well, dear?

VERA

Ssh!

APARTMENTS TO LET

(The slam of a door is heard. VERA turns and comes to LAUREL.)

LAUREL

Five hundred isn't bad, dear.

VERA

Not at all. That was splendid work with Mr. Green.
(The telephone rings. LAUREL answers it.)

LAUREL

Oh, the operator says there's another couple coming to look at one of our apartments.

VERA

Good! Business is picking up. Let's go and rent them the apartment upstairs.

LAUREL

I suppose some people would call this blackmail, but ladies must live!

(HORACE again appears at the door.)

HORACE

Excuse me, I left my umbrella.

LAUREL

Oh! Oh!

HORACE

Please don't do that any more.

VERA

Yes. Forget Jack.

HORACE

I wish I were Jack.

VERA

Jack's dead!

HORACE *(ruefully)*

That's what I mean.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MRS. GREEN (*off stage*)

Horace!

HORACE (*preparing to leave*)

Yes, indeed!

(*He hurries off as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

ONE EGG

A FARCE

by BABETTE HUGHES

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ONE EGG

"One Egg" is a farce. It is, as a glance will show you, an amusing bit of nonsense. But, like all good farces—and like all nonsense artistically treated—the play must be acted as if it were anything but nonsense: that is precisely where the fun comes in. In acting "One Egg," the players must realize that the fun is to be put across largely through the intense earnestness of the cast. It is a good general rule which demands that no actor should ever *try* to be funny. Trust the dramatist; if his play is good, it will reveal its qualities, provided the cast allows it to do so.

The stage setting should be reduced to a minimum of simplicity. A table is positively required—indeed, two tables, with two chairs, of course, for each. And that is all you actually need. It would be well, however, to have just a suggestion of utensils on the tables: knives and forks, menu cards, a plate or two on each table. For background, screens done in white would be admirable. Otherwise, you may mask the sides of the stage with draperies.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR THE MAN

A manuscript

A package of paper

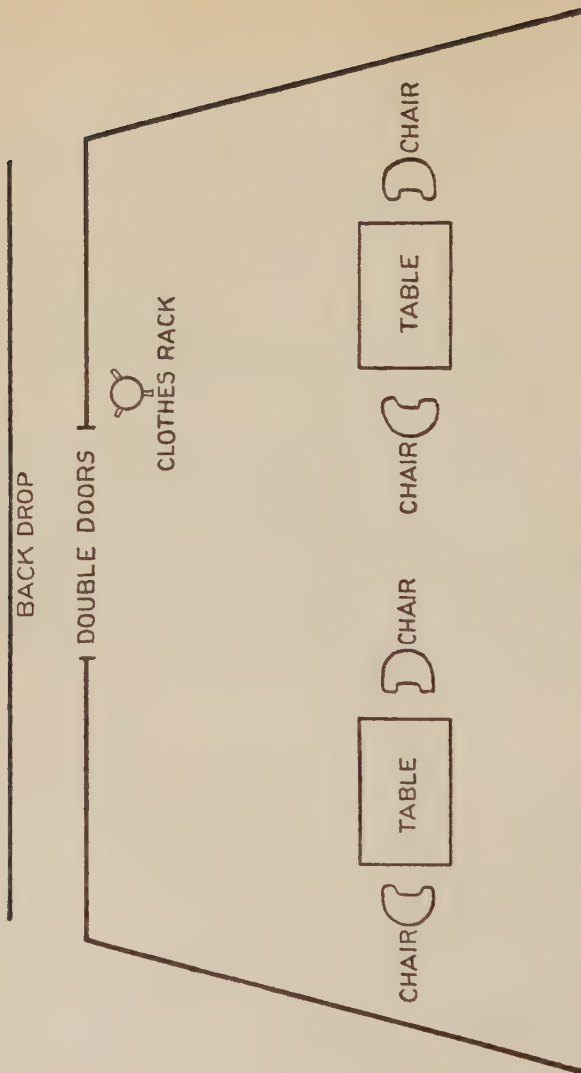
Two or three pencils

FOR THE WOMAN

A hand bag

FOR THE WAITER

A cup of coffee



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "ONE EGG"

ONE EGG

CHARACTERS

THE MAN

THE GIRL

A WAITER

TIME: *Eleven o'clock in the morning*

PLACE: *A small restaurant in New York City*

The restaurant is empty save for an old waiter fussing around. A young man enters from the street with a manuscript under his arm. He carries also a package of new paper and a number of neatly sharpened pencils.

MAN

Hello, King Tut—well, well, well—no one here. How's the hash to-day?

WAITER

Fine, sir, and how are you?

MAN

Me? Say, I've even got it all over the hash. I'm feeling great—better than a Scotchman who has found a thousand dollars.

WAITER

And have you found a thousand dollars, sir?

MAN

Well, not exactly. But if I get a couple of good ideas and work three or four hours I may get enough for my rent and a sirloin steak. Sounds promising, doesn't it?

WAITER

Yes, sir, and how will you have the steak—rare, medium, or well done?

MAN

You old kill-joy! That was a promise, not an order. I'll eat later but I want to work now, so get out and leave me alone for a while. Do you see this paper and these pencils? Well, they're going to get together with a bang—understand?

WAITER

Yes, sir, but what was it you wanted me to do?

MAN

Disappear, dumb-bell! Go drown yourself in the dressing or vanish in vinegar or vanilla—but go out in the kitchen to do it.

WAITER

Yes, sir.

(Starts out quickly.)

MAN

Wait a minute, there! What's your hurry? I want some literary advice. I'll explain the situation. I have a friend and he said to me—you can sit down. (WAITER *remains standing.*) I said you could sit down.

WAITER *(still standing)*

Yes, sir!

MAN

Well, why don't you?

WAITER

Oh, were you talking to me, sir? I thought that was in the story.

MAN

No; that wasn't in the story.
(WAITER *remains standing.*)

MAN

Well, are you going to?

WAITER

No, sir. I'm not tired.

ONE EGG

MAN (*with a look of disgust*)

He said to me: "Do you want to make some money?"

WAITER

Yes, sir—I'd like to very much.

MAN

What?

WAITER

I'd like very much to make some money.

MAN

Oh, you would? Well, I'm sorry, but I can't help you.

So he said, "How would you like to make some money?"

WAITER

I said I'd like it fine, sir.

MAN

Say—will you let me finish my story? That's what the man said to me; not what I'm saying to you! Do you get me?

WAITER

No, sir. Who are you saying it to?

MAN

You, you old green cheese. But the *man* said it to *me*. Now, do you understand?

WAITER

No, sir.

MAN

All right. I'll go on with it, but don't interrupt again if you ever want to carry another tray. You see, this friend of mine is an actor and he's got a pull with the management of some vaudeville circuit. Some one dropped out of their bill the last minute so they telephoned my friend and said, "Bring around an act to-morrow for a fellow and a girl and we'll give you a chance to fill in on this bill." My friend got hold of me and said he'd pay me fifty bucks to hand over a good snappy twenty-minute act

by this evening. Being a little fed up with writing purely for pleasure and artistic value, I couldn't exactly say no to a handful of cold cash. There's the story in a nutshell. Now, tell me, does anything funny ever happen here?
(WAITER *is silent.*)

MAN

Can you think of any amusing situations that have occurred: for instance, men getting bounced for not paying their checks, or old gentlemen complaining about the food, or women having gravy spilt on their best hats by the waiter. You know—the sort of thing that happens every second, and no one can ever think of. Here's your chance to dish out a little advice, and I never saw any one pass up that opportunity. Tell me all about it now.

WAITER

What do you want me to tell you, sir?

MAN

Well, let's see how I can throw some light on it. . . .
(*Thinks. WAITER turns on electric light.*)

MAN

No; not that kind of light. You've seen comedies, haven't you? Well, I thought a restaurant scene, perhaps, with a few complications, might be good and that's why I'm appealing to you. A restaurant is the root of comedy. It has all the elements—noodles three feet long—soup with hair in it—prehistoric hash—onions—corn beef in French, Russian, Spanish and Chinese—a million and one possibilities if I could only think how to use them. Now tell me, does anything funny ever happen here?

WAITER

Funny? Oh, no, sir—nothing funny. We have accidents, sir, but *very* seldom.

MAN

Well, go and have one now—the kind that prevents you from ever having another.

WAITER (*going out*)

Yes, sir.

(*The MAN starts writing. Enter a young lady from the street. She looks around.*)

MAN (*abstractedly*)

This is a hell of a mess! How about a nice little nip of—(*Looks up and sees the GIRL, who looks surprised and insulted*)—lemonade. I beg your pardon—thought you were the waiter. I don't suppose you carry lemonade on your hip or in your hand bag, do you. (*The GIRL draws in hand bag haughtily.*) That's all right—don't look. I guess I can wait until King Tut comes trotting around with the breakfast programs. I shouldn't drink now anyhow. It might extinguish my creative light.

(*The GIRL is trying to decide whether to leave, or risk eating in the same room with a crazy person. Goes to the door and looks out.*)

MAN

You'd better take off your things and stay. It's raining out.

GIRL

What difference does it make to you if I should get wet?

MAN

You see I have such a sympathetic nature that it has a very bad effect on my mind to see *any one* get wet. It really disturbs me almost as much as getting wet myself.

GIRL

Of all the impertinence. . . !

(*Starts to leave.*)

MAN

All right; go ahead if you like, but you won't find a better restaurant. It may not look clean, but they have honest-to-goodness finger bowls and their cooking is wonderful. At least their eggs are—I've never had anything else here. It's very inexpensive, too. (*The GIRL hesitates. She goes*

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

over to a table and sits down.) There; that's fine. Now I hope you and a cup of coffee will conspire to inspire me. Nice sentence, that!—has a scholarly sound. I wish King Tut would hurry—he must have gone to sleep for another thousand years. This monologue has given me an appetite. (*Goes to door leading to kitchen and calls.*) Hey, there, King Tut—come out of your tomb! We want breakfast!

(*Enter WAITER.*)

WAITER

Did you call me, sir?

MAN

No; I called the ghost of your great dead ancestor to see if we'd get any breakfast this morning—but you'll do.

WAITER

Yes, sir. (*Crosses to the GIRL.*) Good morning, miss. Will you have breakfast?

GIRL

Yes, please. I want coffee, and—let me see. . . . Are your eggs newly laid?

WAITER

Oh, yes, ma'am—as fresh as a flower.

GIRL

I'll have one boiled egg. Coffee and one egg.
(*WAITER takes order and exits.*)

MAN

Do you know, that waiter's logic is altogether false—his major premise is wrong, his theory is full of holes, and he wears the dirtiest apron I have ever come across.

GIRL (*amazed*)

What—what do you mean?

MAN

Why, I mean the eggs, of course—fresh as a flower—ridiculous—I've seen millions of dried flowers, and we

ONE EGG

have a funeral wreath at home with wax lilies on. The man's absurd.

GIRL

I think you're absurd.

MAN

He might have said fresh as the west wind—or a brook or—I wonder if a brook would do—?

GIRL

Do you think you can go on talking to me like this?

MAN

Yes—

GIRL

What!

MAN

A brook would!

(WAITER *has entered with coffee.*)

GIRL

This is fine. I'm so hungry—but where is my egg?

WAITER

We can't serve one egg, ma'am—you'll have to order two.

GIRL

I won't have two. This is ridiculous! Why won't you serve me one egg if I want one?

WAITER

I don't know, ma'am. We just never do!

GIRL

I never heard anything like this in all my life. I always take one egg—every morning of my life I've eaten one egg, and in better places than this, too. You must be mistaken.

WAITER

No, ma'am, I'm not. It was the cook, ma'am, who said it.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

He said as how he always has cooked two eggs, and the management won't allow one.

GIRL

Go and ask the cook if he won't cook one egg especially.

WAITER

Especially how, ma'am?

GIRL

Just especially—

WAITER

Especially hard?

GIRL

No—soft; but especially—especially as I ordered it, if you must have every word.

WAITER

Oh, yes, ma'am—especially. I see! One egg especially.

GIRL

Yes, *one egg!!*
(*Exit WAITER.*)

MAN

It must become rather monotonous.
(*The GIRL looks around inquiringly.*)

MAN

I said it must get on your nerves rather.

GIRL (*superciliously and meaningly*)

It does.

MAN

Yes; two or three times a week does me. For instance, one morning I have oatmeal, then on the next—

GIRL

What *are* you talking about?

MAN

Eggs, of course—weren't you?

ONE EGG

GIRL

I wasn't talking with you about anything.

(*Enter WAITER.*)

WAITER

The cook said, ma'am, that he won't do anything particularly.

GIRL

The cook won't do anything?

WAITER

Not the way you said—he won't.

GIRL

Oh! Especially! What shall I do?—I must have an egg—I haven't had a thing since last night, and I'm dreadfully hungry.

WAITER

You might take two eggs.

GIRL

I won't take two eggs—I couldn't eat two, and I refuse to order what I don't want. I never take two eggs. Do you understand?

WAITER

Yes, ma'am—what *will* you have?

GIRL

That's right—I must have something—but there's nothing else I want. You know, every one in our family eats one egg for breakfast—it's really a habit. Except Easter morning—then my father actually eats six!

WAITER

Six? And when is Easter, ma'am?

GIRL

I forget—why?

WAITER

I thought perhaps if to-day was Easter, and if your father eats six—you might—

GIRL

I might eat two, eh? No; you can't get around me like that.

MAN (*hopefully*)

I always eat one egg for breakfast.

GIRL (*to WAITER, disregarding MAN*)

Well—

MAN

I always eat one egg for breakfast. Now, if we could get together—you order one and I'll order one, and we'll have—

WAITER (*excited*)

Two!!!

MAN

No!!! One—order.

GIRL

I don't know whether I want to or not.

MAN

Well, of course that's up to you—but if you really want your egg I'd suggest—

GIRL

I do! Yes, I will!

MAN

What? Love, honor and obey?

GIRL (*to WAITER*)

I'll have my egg soft-boiled.

MAN

Ugh—soft-boiled—how feminine! I'll have *my egg* fried.

WAITER

Yes, sir.

(*Exit.*)

ONE EGG

MAN

Now, to make it easier for the waiter, I'll move over to your table. How about it?

GIRL

I don't think it's necessary.

(He moves over to the GIRL's table. She starts to remove hat.)

MAN

There; that's fine—think of all the energy saved—golden energy. Now, you take off your hat—

GIRL *(putting hat back on)*

I won't!

MAN

And we'll feel quite at home. If I had nothing to worry about, this would be perfect. You see, I'm trying to think of something funny—to write a vaudeville sketch around—a little comedy scene. If you could help me—

GIRL

I help you! I'm not interested in you at all—I don't even care to know who you are.

MAN

That's right—you don't. My name is Christopher Preserve. Not related, however, to the famous line of preserves: raspberry, strawberry, or quince—

GIRL

Chris Preserve! Don't you remember me—at Dartmoor University?

MAN

I went there—but—

GIRL

Mary Cross—now, don't you remember?

MAN

Of course I do—at Dartmoor—out canoeing—wasn't it great? I'm an idiot.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GIRL

Yes—

MAN

What?

GIRL

It was wonderful! Why, it's been so long since I've seen you—four years—ever since graduation. And to think you didn't even recognize me!

MAN

I should have. I don't see how I could help it. I know it was that confounded hat. In fact, I even asked you to take it off. No wonder.

GIRL (*taking off hat*)

You always will get your own way. Heavens, but I'm glad to see you! How is your writing coming—does it really pay for your bread and butter?

MAN

For all I get—which sometimes isn't much. Newspaper assignments buy my lunch and dinner, but hack work pays for my breakfast—which is the reason I always eat *one* egg—

(*WAITER has entered.*)

MAN

Speaking of eggs—

WAITER

You can't have two different kinds of eggs, sir— You can have two boiled eggs or two fried eggs, but not one boiled egg and one fried egg. We don't mix them, sir.

MAN

We don't want them mixed—we want them separate.

GIRL

Do be sensible. (*To WAITER.*) Don't you ever part an order?

ONE EGG

WAITER

No, ma'am; we never do. The cook says that two eggs belong together.

MAN

It must be his family tradition. How romantic. What God has put together let no man put asunder. You go out and ask your cook if a chicken lays two eggs at once.

WAITER

I don't think they do, sir—at least I've never seen one lay two at once.

MAN

Then why try to improve on nature?

WAITER

That's right, sir.

MAN

Then bring me one egg fried, and another egg that the chicken laid, boil and bring to the young lady.

WAITER

Yes, sir—I mean, no sir, I can't.

GIRL

Never mind, waiter—we'll have two soft-boiled eggs.

MAN

Oh, no, Mary! I'm very fond of you, but I can't bear soft eggs—hard, however—I can put up with them.

GIRL

Very well. We'll have one hard- and one soft-boiled egg.

WAITER

Yes, ma'am.

(Exit.)

GIRL

There! That's settled—by means of a woman's tact. I do hope he hurries—I'm almost desperate.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MAN

Yes; by the time it arrives, one egg will look—no, feel, like a drop in a bucket. But tell me about everything that's happened since college, and how you happened to come down here to this out-of-the-way place. You used to live 'way uptown, didn't you?

GIRL

I still do—I had to escape this morning, though. Dad is conducting a contest, and I didn't dare show myself within a mile of the house or I'd have been drafted as a judge. Dad has great faith in my ability to judge contests. The last continued a week and nearly killed me— It did paralyze my sense of humor.

MAN

What sort of a contest—beauty, cooking recipes, or rhymes that go:

“There was a young man named Potato
Who sat on a juicy tomato,” etc.?

GIRL

Nothing like that, but fully as bad. You see, dad is in the vaudeville business and he needs men to turn out acts for him—mostly comedy and farce because they go best. Lowbrow stuff, but fairly well written. When he needs a new man, he has no way to judge them except by the work they produce—a good situation—something to build an act around—anything to prove they have a sense of humor and some dramatic sense. Hundreds of manuscripts come in, so we read them and pick out a man. Of course it's no commercial, stereotyped contest, but not knowing them personally, we have to find a man that way—it would be almost useless to interview them, and the man with the least vices and largest savings account generally can't write a sure-fire laugh line to save his soul; so that's the way it goes. I'm through, though—you can imagine the sort of stuff that comes in. It bores me to

ONE EGG

death. It wouldn't get a smile out of a laughing hyena.
Hurrah! The eggs, at last!
(*The WAITER has entered.*)

MAN

Where are the eggs?

WAITER

The boiled eggs, sir—one hard and one soft?

MAN

That's it *eggs*-actly. Two eggs, but only one order.
Mathematically speaking that amounts to plural eggs and
a singular order.

WAITER

Yes, sir; that's the very words our cook used, sir.

MAN

What words did your cook use?

WAITER

He said it was a very singular order and he'd never seen
one like it before, though he's been cooking here twenty
years or more. He said a lot more, too, sir, but it wasn't
about eggs, sir. He said—

GIRL

Never mind, so long as the eggs weren't involved.

WAITER

Involved, miss? I must have taken your order wrong.
Now, I thought you wanted them boiled.

MAN

This situation is becoming impossible. I never realized
there were so many conversational possibilities in a mere
egg. It branches out in all directions like—a—

WAITER

A plant, sir?

MAN

If I didn't dislike puns so thoroughly I might say an egg plant.

(WAITER *laughs heartily.*)

MAN

It certainly is encouraging to have some one laugh at my jokes.

WAITER

I wasn't laughing at that, sir. I was laughing about something that happened before I came here—when I was waiting on table at the state insane asylum.

GIRL

What was it?

WAITER

Well, miss, there were queer people there. Now, there was one man that wandered around all day long. He wouldn't sit down, and he seemed always hunting for something. Well, he seemed sort of different from the rest who just yelled or had spells, so I thought I'd ask the matron what he was looking for—what was the matter with him.

GIRL

Yes, and what was?

WAITER

She said the man thought he was a poached egg, miss, and he was looking for a piece of toast to sit on.

(*The MAN and GIRL laugh.*)

WAITER

Crazy, wasn't it? I felt sorry for him though. He looked so tired, but nothing would make him sit down, so one day I took him a piece of toast and put it on a chair.

GIRL and MAN

Did he sit on it?

ONE EGG

WAITER

No, sir—I'd forgotten to butter it.

GIRL

That's a wonderful story. And to think it really happened. Why, it's rich in humor.

MAN

But poor in food. I'm about fed up on humor and starved for eggs. For heaven's sake, waiter, let's hash this out.

WAITER

Hash for you, sir, and what will the lady have?

GIRL

I, for one, am set on one egg.

MAN

You see how unusual you are! Ordinary hens are in the habit of setting on a large number of eggs.

GIRL

For heaven's sake, Chris, stop your chatter and let's get down to—to—

MAN

Breakfast!

GIRL

Yes; or, rather, let's get the breakfast down us. My coffee is already cold, and we haven't even settled on the treatment of our eggs.

MAN

It really takes time to settle on anything so delicate as eggs—particularly fresh ones.

WAITER

Shall I bring your coffee, sir? That will give you time to think, and maybe a cup of hot coffee will—er—

MAN

Yes; I'm sure it will. Go and get it. You might bring a hot cup for the young lady as well. Hurry, though, and by the time the coffee is ready, I'll have thought.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

WAITER

Yes, sir. I hope so.

(*Exit.*)

GIRL

What impertinence! He seems dreadfully impatient. You know, I'm sure you're just the man father needs—if you only had a sample to show him—a one-act play, maybe. I know what let's do while we're waiting. Let's write the scenario for one and then you could show it to him. I was thinking that this egg situation bringing us together—

MAN

What a lovely thought! It *has* brought us together, hasn't it? Maybe forever!

GIRL

I mean bringing us together to the same table would make a delightful idea for a comedy—especially for vaudeville. Of course we could exaggerate as much as we pleased. And I've even thought of a title—a wonderful title for a play—"One Egg."

MAN

Play, nothing! That's a myth!

GIRL

We can expand it—

MAN

Wait until we get it.

GIRL

And fill it with puns and epigrams.

MAN

Or shrimp and cucumber. No, no! I was confusing it with stuffed tomatoes. Puns and epigrams. That's fine! Eggs stuffed with puns and—

GIRL

The scene will be in a restaurant. Shall it be French, Italian, Spanish, German, or American?

ONE EGG

MAN

Oh, any old kind.

GIRL

Like this one! The man will be sitting at a table—

MAN

He wouldn't be very likely to just sit at a table. Wouldn't he be doing something? Writing, or something. That's what I was doing—writing a sketch for a friend of mine who is an actor.

GIRL

Of course he would. Writing—that's fine. Then the girl will enter and sit down—exactly as I did. She'll order one egg, which the waiter will refuse to bring. The man will then state impertinently—

MAN

"I always eat one egg for breakfast"—but not impertinently. The man and girl then get together and agree to order two eggs. The eggs, of course, must be symbolic. How beautiful—their destinies are to be forever joined in—

GIRL

A frying pan.

MAN

Heavens, no! You know, it's really quite idealistic—two eggs—two minds united—blended—

GIRL

I'd prefer them soft-boiled. I certainly am hungry!

MAN

So am I; but this idea fascinates me. After all, we are like two eggs—

GIRL

Well, it doesn't fascinate me. I object to being called an egg—especially if you are the other in the order.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MAN

You must submit to it now, though, for literary purposes. But see here—before you plan out the whole act, you should consider the climax. After all, that's the most important part of a play. It has to end—we couldn't go on talking forever. The audience would be dreadfully bored. Twenty minutes is quite enough.

GIRL

That's right; but how shall we end it? What shall we say? Of course the girl's father will find that the hero is the very man he needs to write for him, but that comes afterwards. We can only insinuate that in the plot.

MAN

Books on playwriting always say that plays like this should build up to the curtain line, and that should be the lid—the crux of the matter—the big punch. In this situation, for instance, everything depends on the eggs—whether or not the characters finally get them.

GIRL

Why, of course they do—otherwise they might starve. In fact, I'm very near starvation myself.

MAN

What way shall their eggs be cooked, then? That's the only point left to determine.

GIRL

That's it—what way *shall* they be cooked? Let's see—there are boiled eggs, fried eggs, poached eggs, coddled eggs, and—and—

MAN and GIRL (*together*)

Scrambled eggs!

MAN

Hurrah for scrambled eggs! They will unscramble the plot!

ONE EGG

GIRL

I adore scrambled eggs!

(Enter WAITER.)

MAN

That's the curtain line. The hero will turn to the waiter, and say "scrambled eggs, please!"

WAITER

Yes, sir!

(The MAN and GIRL turn to look at WAITER in surprise. The WAITER makes a hasty exit, and the MAN and GIRL turn to each other laughing.)

CURTAIN

THE END OF THE TRAIL

A MODERN REALISTIC DRAMA

by ERNEST HOWARD CULBERTSON

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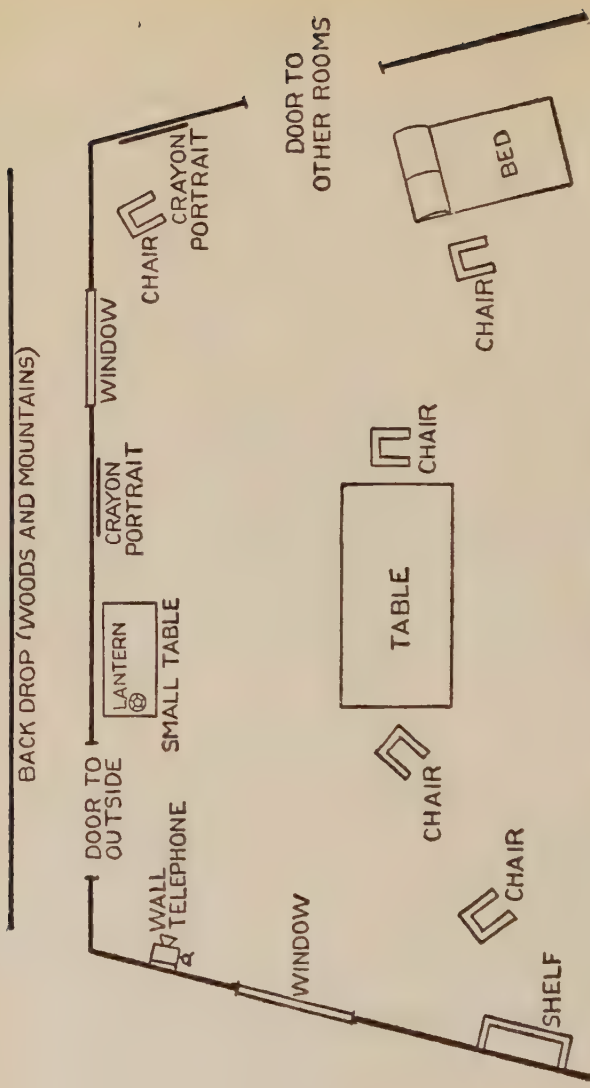
THE END OF THE TRAIL

Few one-act plays are more forceful than this grim episode of Mr. Culbertson's which, with comparatively simple staging, can be made tremendously moving. All that is actually necessary in the setting is to *suggest* the privation and complete isolation of Martha and John. The effectiveness of the piece rests almost entirely with Martha, and your most experienced actress should be given this rôle. She should be cautioned not to "point" too emphatically the business and lines early in the action concerning the lantern and the train's approach, as otherwise the audience might be led to anticipate the climax. If the off-stage crash effect at the end is found too difficult to reproduce realistically, a quick curtain following Martha's hysterical laugh will in no way minimize the dramatic effect. Indeed, it will probably be found more gripping to omit the crash altogether, allowing this to be imagined by an expectant audience.

"The End of the Trail" under the title of "The Tiger in 'Em" won first prize in the contest conducted by the Plays and Players Club of Philadelphia in 1923. It is here printed for the first time in book form.

PROPERTY LIST

Oil lamp with dark shade	Medicine bottles
Small shelf clock	Pasteboard boxes
Wall telephone	Match box
Red railroad lantern	Roll of bandages
Old clothes and old shoes	Tin pan
One shotgun	Towel and wash rag
Mounted cow horns	Bag of hops
Large crayon portraits of girl and boy	



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "THE END OF THE TRAIL"

THE END OF THE TRAIL

CHARACTERS

BILL WATSON
MARTHA HINLEY
JOHN HINLEY

PLACE: *Cascade Mountains, Oregon.* TIME: *Now*

SCENE: *The curtain rises on the small, bare, cramped living room of a shack in the Cascade Mountains, Oregon. There is a door at the right back, and when it is open one gets a view of a narrow valley with beetling mountains towering skywards on the opposite side. There is a small four-square paned window at left back, and a similar one at right center. There is a door at left center leading into the other room of the house. In the wall, right, is a shelf on which stands a number of old pasteboard boxes, half a dozen or so partially filled medicine bottles, and an oil lamp. Underneath the shelf on nails and hooks, hang a variegated assortment of old coats, aprons, hats, etc. Immediately below on the floor stand several pairs of old boots and shoes. On the left, down stage, stands a small bed. There is no spread on it—just a pair of blankets over the mattress and two pillows at the farther end. The pillow slips are soiled and mussed. In the center of the room stands a small, rough-hewn table covered with a red and white checked tablecloth. At the back, near the door, there is another table—still smaller—and on it stands an unlit red lantern. Four or five rough kitchen chairs stand here and there about the room. There is an antiquated wall telephone on the wall on the up-stage side of the window, right—of the style in use in the middle and late nineties. On the wall, back, there is a crayon portrait of an eight-year-old boy, and on the wall, left, another of a girl*

about eighteen. On the wall, right, hangs an old shotgun and several mounted horns.

Discovered: MARTHA HINLEY, seated near the table, center, patching a pair of old trousers. She is a woman of about fifty-two. The events of a hard, bitter life have taken their toll and she looks old and broken—much older than she really is. Her hair is gray and thin and drawn back tightly from a wrinkled forehead. Her cheeks are shrunk and drawn. The expression in her eyes alternates between one of angry, bitter protest and brooding, tragic despair. She works, now with the listlessness of one for whom the burdens of life have come to weigh too heavily, and now with a feverish, impetuous vigor, as though to drive out the thoughts which crowd into her mind. Once she drops her work with a little cry of anguish, jumps up and goes to the window, right, where she stands with clenched hands, staring fiercely out, and breathing convulsively. She returns to her work at length. Presently, as though from some distance down the mountain side, there comes a far-away "Hallo!" MARTHA rises and hurries to the door, back, opens it and steps out. She peers down, and off, left, and in the course of a moment or two, spies some one and waves her hand.

MARTHA

Hello thar!

BILL (*from below*)

Hello! Hello, Marthy!

MARTHA

Hello, Bill!

BILL

This trail gits steeper every time I travel it.

MARTHA

Takes all the steam a body's got.

BILL

An' when yuh're old an' ain't got no steam—

THE END OF THE TRAIL

MARTHA

Yuh're steppin' like a two-year-old!

BILL (*with a laugh. He is quite near now*)

Don't give me no belly-wash like that—w'en yuh kin hear my j'int's creak from har to Chilton. (*Pause. Then he speaks as though only a few steps away.*) Whewee! The more yuh ile 'em the wuss they git!

MARTHA

Spokane "red-eye" ain't the right kind-a ile.

BILL

Not even Injun "red-eye" 'ud make 'em swing easy. (*Appears at the door.*) Been nigh onto three weeks since I was up har. Thought I'd drap over an' see how John was treatin' yuh—an' what yuh're ideas is on politics an' religion—and the natur'-a things in ginerál.

MARTHA

Him an' me was jist talkin' 'bout yuh last night.
(*MARTHA enters, back, followed by BILL.*)

BILL

Now I know why my ears was itchin' like blue hell.
(*MARTHA smiles—faintly. BILL WATSON is a big, gruff miner. His hair is dark and scraggly, and the lower part of his face is covered with a stubble beard. He wears overalls, a leather coat, boots, and carries an old battered felt hat in his hand. He closes the door after him.*)

BILL

Whar's John?

MARTHA (*with somber preoccupation*)

Out on the tracks. He—he's down toward O'Fallon's sidin'. (*Steps to the window, right, and stares out apprehensively.*) Couple of slides down that-a-way last week. He don't hardly sleep nights from worryin' for fear thar'll be more.

BILL

When a lot-a loose dirt an' rocks git restless an' hit the

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

trail down'ards all hell an' a year of lyin' awake nights
ain't goin' to stop 'em.

MARTHA (*turns away from the window*)

That's what I keep tellin' him. But it don't make no difference what yuh say to him.

BILL

No, I s'pose not.

MARTHA (*points to chair to left of table*)

Sit down!

BILL (*sitting*)

Don't mind if I do.

(*He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a short clay pipe and a bag of tobacco. Proceeds to fill the pipe painstakingly. MARTHA drops down in a chair on the opposite side of the table.*)

MARTHA (*dismally*)

Slides—slides! If it ain't them—it's somethin' else.

BILL

This is the time of year fer 'em. Gotta take things as they come, Marthy, in this har world.

MARTHA

Easy enough ter say that.

BILL (*studies her intently for a moment*)

Yuh take life too serious.

MARTHA (*bitterly*)

Most anybody would—who'd been through what me an' John have.

BILL

Life ain't no easy, greased slide fer nobody.

MARTHA

It's give us nothin' but kicks an' slams.

THE END OF THE TRAIL

BILL

Yuh stick too close to home, Marthy—if yuh don't mind me tellin' yuh.

MARTHA

Somehow I don't take ter none of the people out this har way.

BILL

John could easy git yuh transportation back to St. Paul—whenever yuh want it.

MARTHA (*with a little shudder*)

Don't never want to see St. Paul again. The—the only time in my life when I been a little bit happy was back thar. It—it's whar I first knowed John—me an' him was married thar—an' my first baby was born in a little house down on Lisner Street—an'—an' well—yuh jist see—

BILL (*nods, lights his pipe and blows a mouthful of smoke at the ceiling*)

I understand, Marthy.

MARTHA

Never seen nobody so conscientious as John.

BILL

Alla's on the job, ain't he?

MARTHA

As long as he kin crawl he'll be out thar doin' his part.

BILL

I knowed he was a hustler the first day I sot eyes on him.

MARTHA

The limited's due in half an hour—an' yuh couldn't drag him off them tracks till it gits through.

BILL (*smiles*)

Kind-a stuck on that ole rattler, ain't he?

MARTHA (*nods*)

Like as if it was a pet or some teeny child. He's half sick from worryin' whenever it gits held up—just a little bit.

As if he could stop a washout or a slide or keep it from snowin'!

BILL (*with a contemplative, understanding smile*)

He's jist built that way—that's all.

MARTHA

If he'd only let up—just a little. He's gittin' old an' he ain't strong. The company don't half 'preciate him. Never did an' never will!

BILL

Men like John don't git their due in this world. The best they kin hope fer is to store up glory fer "kingdom come."

MARTHA (*shakes her head*)

He ain't got no right to be out thar now. He—he was walkin' them tracks till half-past twelve last night—till after Number Two went through. Then up ag'in at five—an' out most-a the day.

BILL

Don't want ter take no chances. Couldn't if he wanted ter.

MARTHA (*rises, goes to box, back, and lights the red lantern*)

Liable to rush in har any minute fer this. May as well git it ready fer him. (*Returns slowly to the chair, right of table, and sits.*) What credit does he git fer takin' his job serious. Fer not sleepin' nights—fer bein' out in all kinds of weather—gettin' his feet an' hands near froze off—fer killin' himself by inches? Let a little wreck happen along somewheres—an' they make him out responsible—an' all them thirty years' work for the road ain't goin' to count fer nothin'.

BILL

I wouldn't swim no river till I come to 'em, Marthy.

MARTHA

Allus—ever since he started out workin' fer it—it's been the road. The road! He's so sweet an' gentle-like—an' tries to reason it all out. Now an' then he gits took down

THE END OF THE TRAIL

with a spell of sciatica an' he lies thar on the bed an' talks to me by the hour 'bout it. Keeps goin' on 'bout this har road—an' the others bein' to the country what a vein or artery is to your body—an' that we are doin' somethin' patriotic an' noble by helpin' keep 'em in shape. He calls our road "a gateway to the Orient." Says somebody's got to do the work to keep it in order an' clare an' it might as well be us.

BILL (*blows a mouthful of smoke at the ceiling*)

That's one way a-lookin' at it!

MARTHA (*in harsh, rasping tones*)

I don't see it that-a way—an' never will! I don't see nothin' noble in slavin' an' slavin'—year in an' year out—an' most-a the time so onhappy an' half-sick yuh wish yuh was dead! Thar ain't nothin' in it!

BILL

Yuh an' him have had it hard.

MARTHA

An' it keeps gittin' harder—the older we git—

BILL

Yuh an' John been pretty close-mouthed. Yuh ain't never tol' me how yuh happened to come up this har way.

MARTHA (*frowns, compresses her lips tightly, then proceeds as before*)

He—he started out as a wiper on the engines in the round-house in St. Paul. It was his first job—Joe Ferris give it to him—an' I met him 'bout a year or two after. It wasn't long 'fore they made him a hostler an' then him an' me got married. After he'd been thar 'bout ten year they made him a foreman. He hadn't had this job no more 'an a year or two 'fore his health got so bad he couldn't hardly drag one foot after 'nother. The smoke an' grease an' dirt was too much fer him. (*She taps her chest. BILL nods.*) The company give him a job as assistant section boss out at Minot. He done so well that

the boss got scar't he was goin' to git his job, an' made complaints to the superintendent. After that they made him engineer at a water tank out in the bad lands. Not a tree, or a house, or a fence within ten mile of it. Most God-forsaken place yuh was ever in. (*She hesitates a moment and gives a dry, racking sob.*) The climate thar didn't agree with our daughter Minnie an'—an' she died. An' no more had she been dead an' John hurt his hands—an' was laid up ever so long. It crippled him fer life. Ever since he ain't been able to do no liftin' or handlin'.

BILL

I notice he allus favors his left hand.

MARTHA (*nods*)

Then Sam Bartlett—he was assistant to the master mechanic—got him a job as agent at a little station called Ulm on the Butte branch. (*Glances up at the picture on the wall.*) It was while we was thar that little Harry died. The—water done it—we allus thought. We couldn't stand stayin' thar after that. Then they give John this track walkin' job.

(*She jumps up and strides to and fro with clenched hands and a wild, malevolent glitter in her eyes. BILL smokes in contemplative silence. The wind outside now rises to a mournful howl.*)

MARTHA (*with a shudder*)

Listen to that wind! Listen! A storm's comin'—

BILL

We may git a little snow.

MARTHA

Blizzard more likely.

BILL

Oh, I dunno. They tell me the Chinook's goin'-a blow steady this winter.

MARTHA (*with a sneer*)

What does anybody know how the Chinook is goin'-a

THE END OF THE TRAIL

blow? (*Raising her voice to a plaintive, raucous wail.*) Oh, fate has been ag'in us—beatin' us down, grindin' us in the dirt, pushin' us under! When I look at these har mountains—so high an' turrible—they seem to be mockin' us! Mockin' us, I say!

BILL

I git to feelin' that way sometimes myself, Marthy. But it don't do no good. It's usually when I ain't had my sleep an' this har cantankerous liver-a mine is cuttin' up didoes.

MARTHA (*goes to the window, right, and stares out, then turns away at length—with a shudder*)

Back in the shops in St. Paul—in the winter—when they're gittin' the sleepers ready fer the run to the coast, the men keep sayin' to each other, "Well, I hope she gits through the Cascades." An' they keep askin' each other an' the crews that come through from Seattle an' Portland, "How are the Cascades? Did yuh make the Cascades all right?" At Minot when Number One west bound passes Number Two east bound yuh can't hear nothin' but the nigger porters on Number One shoutin' at them on Number Two. "How are the Cascades? Are they chock full of snow? Are we goin' to git caught?" Or in the summer, "How are the Cascades? Any fires? Are the Cascades clare?" At St. Paul, Minot, Havre, Kalispell or Seattle—it's allus, "How are the Cascades?" The whole road stands in fear of 'em—like some great divil that kin cast a spell. An' when the snow begins to fly yuh kin feel the fear settlin' down on everybody—like a pall—east an' west.

BILL (*nods*)

I know, I know. They allus been hell in winter.

MARTHA

An', now, har we are—right up in 'em—agin 'em—facin' another turrible winter! I git chucked right up agin the very things I hated an' feared. (*She breaks off and stares fiercely into space.*) If—if it wasn't fer John—Gawd bless him—I don't know what I'd do. He's all I got now!

(*Savagely.*) Why should we be doin' this so rich people from back east kin ride through in fine upholstered coaches—sleepin' safe— (*Wildly.*) Oh, I hate 'em—I hate 'em—an' these har turrible mountains!

(*Suddenly the door, back, bursts open, and JOHN HINLEY staggers in, deathly pale; blood streams from a deep gash on his forehead. He is a middle-aged man, with weather-beaten face, mild blue eyes, and thin gray hair. His shoulders are stooped. His manner is kindly, philosophic, mild. He wears a pair of worn and patched overalls, a jumper, and over this a short leather jacket. In one hand he carries an old cloth cap, with ear flaps turned down. MARTHA leaps to his side with an agonized cry. BILL rises and hurries to him.*)

MARTHA (*grabs his arm*)

John! John, honey! What's the matter?

BILL (*supporting him on the opposite side*)

What hit yuh, ole man?

JOHN (*feebly*)

A slide! It got me!

MARTHA

Oh, my Gawd!

BILL

Whar did it hit yuh?

JOHN

Mostly on—on the side—seems like—I dunno— A rock hit me on the head. Knocked me out—fer a few minutes.

MARTHA

I knowed somethin' like this was goin' to happen! I knowed it!

JOHN

It—it's a good thing I was out—an' seen it— Right thar—two hundred feet west-a the tool house—
(*Points off, left.*)

THE END OF THE TRAIL

MARTHA

You're pale—an' yuh ain't breathin' right—my pore honey!
Whar—whar does it hurt yuh? Tell Marthy!

JOHN (*weakly, as he makes a pathetic attempt to smile*)

I—I ain't bad off. Don't take on. All I got was a bad bumpin'. To—to please yuh we'll have the company doctor come out on Number Four in the mornin'—an'—

(*His knees suddenly give way and he starts to sink to the floor. They exert their full strength and manage to keep him on his feet.*)

MARTHA

John—honey! (*Searches his face with an anguished gaze.*) Yuh're weak as a rag—! Whar does it hurt?
(*In an hysterical undertone to BILL.*) He ain't goin' to—?

BILL (*shakes his head violently and replies in preëmtory tones*)

No, no! Git him over on the bed.

JOHN

I'm—I'm goin' to—to be all right. Just a bad bumpin', that's all.

(*They half carry him to the bed, left, and lay him on it. MARTHA, with BILL'S help slowly takes off his leather coat*)

MARTHA

No, no—don't try to set up—! Thar—thar—! We'll git it off— Be careful— Oh! (*They contrive to get one sleeve off without much difficulty. He winces and groans as they turn him gently over on his side preparatory to getting off the other one.*) Does it hurt yuh thar?

BILL

His shoulder, I reckon. Easy, ole boy!

JOHN (*with a little gasp and feebly*)

My—my side—jist a little—

MARTHA (*while BILL holds him on his side, she pulls off the other sleeve with the greatest care*)

Thar—! Thar—! Up easy like—jist a little. That's it! Now—now—(*She tosses the coat on a chair, then with BILL's assistance places him gently back in position.*) Git me a pan-a water an' a rag, Bill—quick—!

BILL

Yes, ma'am.

(*He jumps up and exits, hurriedly, left. She goes to table, center, opens the drawer, takes out a small roll of bandages and a towel, then she returns to the bed and sits down again.*)

MARTHA (*bends over and gazes beseechingly into his eyes*)

Honey, are yuh hurt bad—d'yuh think? Tell me! Tain't goin' ter do no good if yuh make out yuh ain't—if yuh are. It's only goin' ter make things worse.

JOHN (*with a pathetic little laugh*)

Just side-swiped me—that's all. Set me down kind-a hard. Now, don't you worry, Marthy. I'll be up an' around an' spry an' chipper as ever—in a day or two—

(*His face contorts and he breaks off as though suffering a sudden twinge of pain. BILL enters, left, carrying a small tin pan of water and a ragged wash cloth. He pulls up a chair to the side of the bed near MARTHA, sets the pan on it and hands the cloth to her.*)

MARTHA

I'll git that blood an' dirt off yuh're face.

JOHN (*to BILL*)

Looks as though—I got handed—a kind—a rotten deal.

BILL (*shakes his head*)

One-a them things yuh can't figur', ole boy.

(*MARTHA proceeds to wash JOHN's face.*)

MARTHA (*examines the cut*)

That's—that's a bad 'un, honey.

JOHN (*with a feeble laugh*)

Did git me kind-a square.

THE END OF THE TRAIL

MARTHA (*with a shudder*)

Might-a been one-a them big 'uns that 'ud mashed the life clean out-a yuh.

JOHN

But it wasn't, Marthy—an' a miss is good as a mile.

(*She wipes his face, then carefully adjusts one edge of the bandage over the cut, winds it about his head and pins it. All at once a wild look comes into his eyes and he raises himself up on one arm with a tremendous effort.*)

JOHN (*with a cry of fear and anguish*)

Marthy!

MARTHA

What is it?

JOHN

The limited!

MARTHA (*glances at the clock*)

'Tain't due in Chilton yet. We got plenty of time. An' it may be late.

JOHN

The slide—it took down the lines—! See if yuh kin git Chilton—!

(*The woman rises quickly, goes to the phone, right, turns the crank rapidly several times, then takes down the receiver and puts it to her ear.*)

MARTHA

Hello, hello! Hello, hello! (*She presses down the receiver bar and gives the crank several rapid turns.*) Hello, hello!

JOHN (*in a hoarse whisper*)

See—! I told yuh! They're down—!

(*MARTHA hangs up the receiver, and comes back to the bed.*)

BILL (*in a low voice*)

Couldn't git 'em?

MARTHA

No.

JOHN (*excitedly*)

Somebody'll have ter flag her now! Somebody'll have ter git out thar with the lantern—!

BILL

I'll hike down ter O'Fallon's an' swing it thar at the head of the canyon.

JOHN

Yeah, yeah, Bill—that's what yuh do—! Give 'em the "high ball" thar—! Marthy, d'yuh hear—?

MARTHA

Don't yuh worry, honey! We'll take keer of that all right. 'Tain't the first time it's happened this way. Thar, thar, now! You remember— (JOHN'S face suddenly contorts in pain, and he gasps and sinks back on the bed. She leans over him in anguished solicitation.) What is it? What is it? Tell me, honey! Does it hurt yuh so bad?

JOHN (*puts a hand to his side*)

It's gittin' me—right thar—

MARTHA

Yes, yes. Let Marthy rub it fer yuh.

(*She starts to open his shirt. He groans.*)

JOHN

Some—somethin' hot, Marthy—reckon it'll do more good 'an rubbin'.

MARTHA (*jumps to her feet*)

The bag-a hops!

(JOHN smiles faintly and nods. BILL starts toward back, as though to get the lantern.)

MARTHA (*with a convulsive sob as she hurries to his side and lays a restraining hand on his arm*)

Bill—!

THE END OF THE TRAIL

BILL

Yeah?

MARTHA

Stay har with him till I git the hops het up. Only take me a minute or so. Then yuh kin go.

BILL

Sure, Marthy—jist as yuh say—

MARTHA

Thar's plenty-a time—

(She turns and moves quickly toward the door, left. Just before she reaches it, she pauses and glances at JOHN, gives vent to several prolonged sobs, then exits. BILL returns slowly to the side of the bed and sits. JOHN gives another little gasp, rolls his eyes for a moment or two, then groans softly.)

BILL

Givin' yuh hell, eh? (JOHN *nods*.) Yuh will step in front of the side of a mountain jist to save the company a little time an' money. (*Laughs*.) I'm kind-a hefty meself—but I never figured I could buck a ton-a flyin' dirt an' rocks an' git away with a whole hide.

JOHN (*smiles*)

Didn't git no chanct ter look her over.

BILL (*shakes his head playfully*)

Wouldn't put it past yuh—even if yuh had. No, siree!

JOHN (*with another mighty effort raises himself on one elbow*)

Listen—! (*He glances apprehensively toward door, left, then reaches over and grips BILL's hand tightly.*) I'm pretty bad off. It—it was a big 'un an'—an' it caught me square. I—I heard her comin' but I warn't spry enough. She caught me an' carried me down thirty feet this side of the track. Right out har—three hundred foot from the house. Knocked me plumb out. When I come to they warn't nothin' but my head stickin' out. Mouth was full of

dirt—an' my eyes, too—so I could hardly see. I—I had to dig an' claw my way out. Didn't have no strength—an' I don't know how long it took me ter git out. Seemed like hours.

(He pauses, breathing with considerable difficulty. MARTHA can be heard sobbing hysterically, off left.)

MARTHA

Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd! Why d'yuh bring things like this on us? Why d'yuh? *(With a wait.)* I knowed somethin' like this was goin' to happen! I knowed it!

JOHN *(with an expression, half of heartfelt sympathy and half of despair)*

Listen to her! Jist listen!

BILL

Takes it hard, don't she?

(Her lamentations stop momentarily.)

JOHN *(speaks with greater effort now)*

I had-a crawl on my hands an' knees—most all the way har.

BILL *(bends over and peers into his face)*

Yuh don't look none too good!

JOHN

Somethin's busted inside.

BILL

Yuh think so?

JOHN

It feels that way. An' I seem ter be gettin' weaker.

BILL

We oughter git a doctor har quick.

JOHN

I dunno—I might be able ter hold out—until mornin'—

BILL

But McCafferty won't send no doc out on Number Four—

THE END OF THE TRAIL

'cause thar ain't no way of lettin' him know what fix yuh're in.

JOHN (*resignedly*)

Then—then thar ain't nuthin' ter do—but sit tight.

BILL (*with an idea*)

I could hitch up them broncs—a mine an' git over to Hooper Springs in a couple of hours. If ole Doc Fletcher ain't out somewhars I kin pick him up an' maybe with luck git back by midnight—or a little after. That's quicker 'an goin' ter Busby or Chilton.

JOHN (*shakes his head*)

Don't bother ter do nothin' like that.

BILL

Hells-fire, thar ain't no use takin' chances.

JOHN

Kin yuh drive that road at night?

BILL

I drove it when yuh couldn't see yer hand before yer nose.

(JOHN closes his eyes for a moment or two, as though yielding to weakness and pain. Suddenly he opens them, with a look of fear, and clutches BILL'S arm tightly.)

JOHN

Bill—!

BILL

Yeah—?

JOHN

Git down to O'Fallon's with the lantern—as fast as yuh kin—!

BILL

Jist a minute. I want to tell Marthy whar I'm goin' after.

MARTHA (*from the next room left*)

Oh, Gawd! Oh, Gawd! Ain't we never goin' to have it

easy? Ain't it ever goin' to be nothin' but trouble, an' accidents an' death? Oh, Gawd!

JOHN (*sinks back on the bed*)

Listen to her, Bill! Jist listen! (*He is now perceptibly weaker than a few minutes before.*) That's the way she goes on when anything happens to me. Yuh see, she ain't got no one else now. She—she's a good—woman—! Faithful—an' hard workin' an' kind—! They—Gawd listen! They don't make 'em no better. But—but life seems to be—gittin' too much fer her. She—she don't stop—don't stop to figur' things out. I—I was careless—same as this time maybe—when I hurt my hand. An' if we'd been more careful—as we had a right to be—'bout the water at Ulm little Harry 'ud still be alive. The—the company ain't no charity organization. It's allus done the best it could fer me. Them people back east, an' the passengers on the limited, an' these har mountains an' the snow—they ain't got nothin' to do with our bad luck. (*MARTHA gives vent to a mournful wail.*) But she—(*Shakes his head despairingly.*) Yuh can't make 'em reason it out—logical-like to a finish. Now an' then, they seem ter git the whole lay-out twisted—an' grab at things. (*In a hoarse whisper.*) It's—it's the tiger in 'em, Bill! The tiger in 'em.

BILL (*nods*)

Yuh can't figur' 'em. But I wouldn't bother 'bout that now.

(*MARTHA enters, left, carrying the bag of hops. BILL rises. MARTHA goes to the bed, bends over and carefully places the bag at JOHN's side. He moans softly, makes an effort to smile, then closes his eyes. She notes that he has grown considerably weaker, and picks up his hand and feels his pulse.*)

BILL (*in an undertone, as he points over his shoulder,*

Guess I'll be travelin'.

(*She gives a quick nod, and he moves to back, and picks*

THE END OF THE TRAIL

up the lantern. MARTHA gives a little gasp of suppressed anguish, and drops JOHN's hand.)

MARTHA (*turns and calls*)

Bill—! (*He pauses and she hurries to his side.*) His—pulse is awful weak—an' unsteady—! An'—an' Gawd—the way he's breathin'—!

BILL

He's in kinda bad shape, Marthy.

MARTHA (*they speak in undertones*)

This is turrible. We oughter have a doctor—quick.

BILL

I'm goin' to Hooper Springs an' fetch Doc Fletcher—as soon as I stop this har train—

(MARTHA turns and gazes at JOHN.)

MARTHA

How—how long'll it take yuh ter git him—d'yuh think?

BILL

With luck I'll git back by midnight.

(MARTHA stands in tense thought for a moment or two.

BILL consults his watch.)

MARTHA (*impulsively, at length*)

The—the limited may be an hour or two late. Yuh kin never tell. Sometimes she's right on the dot an' then ag'in she ain't—!

BILL

Well—of course—figurin' that way—

MARTHA (*grabs his arm*)

Go on an' git the doc—an' I'll give her the "high ball."

BILL

Yuh'll git out an' swig it—?

MARTHA

Done it twict before—when John was laid up with sciatica.

BILL

Go hikin' down them tracks with the wind blowin' forty mile an hour?

MARTHA

I done it already, I tell yuh—onc't after a blizzard when the snowplow was stuck in the cut by Shimmer's. Went down to O'Fallon's an' give 'em the "high ball." An' onc't I stood on a rock out thar by the tracks an' give it to 'em. On a clare night—like this—the engineer kin see two miles down the canyon—an' they allus whistle an' slow up east of O'Fallon's.

BILL

Well—if yuh figur' yuh kin do it all right—
(*Sets the lantern back on the box.*)

MARTHA

I could almost set it in the window an' they'd see it. (*With a little cry of despair.*) He's so bad off, Bill—don't yuh see—! (*Wrings her hands.*) I never seen him worse. Oh, Gawd! A half hour might make all the difference in the world.

BILL (*in low, sympathetic tones*)

Jist as yuh say, Marthy.

MARTHA

Mighty good-a yuh ter go, Bill—!

BILL

'Tain't nothin' at all. Good-by. I'll git back as soon as ever I kin.

MARTHA

I know yuh will. Good-by. (*BILL exits, back. MARTHA goes over to the bed and sits on the side. Bending over him, she speaks in low, gentle tones.*) Honey—!
(*JOHN opens his eyes and gazes at her with a dazed look.*)

JOHN

That—that yuh—Marthy—?

THE END OF THE TRAIL

MARTHA

Yes, yes. How d'yuh feel now?

JOHN

A-all right—all right—but— (*Breaks off and smiles faintly.*) Slides—yuh kin never tell—when they're comin'—yuh kin never tell—

MARTHA

Don't yuh try to talk!

JOHN (*gradually growing delirious*)

Never—never got caught before. Allu's think-a—poor Hogan—who got carried down with his engine!— If the roadbed thar—at Flathead hadn't been soft—it 'ud never happened. Roadbed—roadbed—that's—that's what Nicholson used ter say— 'Member, Marthy, it's the best road—in the country, now—a—a—great link 'tween east an' west—an' to the Gateway of the Orient—! The—the great steel trail—ter—ter Asia! Heavier rails, though—if they're goin' ter put them giant “hogs” on the mountain division.

MARTHA

Thar, thar, honey!

JOHN

Rails—rails—rails—an' steel goin' up—! They—they say the Japan trade is goin' ter pick up in the spring— But—but me an' you'll keep the road clare—won't we, Marthy? Let 'em send a dozen extras through. We'll do it! We gotta do it. Greatest road in the world. A—a great arter—

MARTHA

Honey—please stop—!

JOHN (*rises up, struggling to get his breath*)

Marthy—I—yuh an' me—

MARTHA (*puts her arm about him and supports him*)

Lie down, honey—yuh ain't—!

(She attempts to force him gently back on the bed, but he struggles desperately to sit erect.)

JOHN *(breathing with great effort)*

Gotta git over ter—ter the shops, Marthy—Joe—Joe Ferriss'll be wonderin' why I ain't back—

MARTHA

Hush! Hush! Yuh ain't seen Joe in thirty years—

JOHN

He—he's thar at the shop—now—

(At length he gives up the effort to sit up, and sinks limply back in her arms. He tries to speak but is unable to do so; his eyes roll and he struggles for breath. From time to time his body twitches and his face becomes distorted with pain. After a brief interval he grows very calm, and his breathing seems to become easier. He looks up at her with an expression of great placidity and a faint smile plays over his face.)

JOHN *(in a whisper)*

Marthy—yuh allus been—my—

(He breaks off, his eyes close and his head sinks down on his chest. MARTHA stares at him in dumb horror for a moment or two, then gives a piercing cry of wild, passionate anguish, lets his body sink prone on the bed, and leaps to her feet.)

MARTHA *(in a hoarse, frantic wail)*

Oh, Gawd—! Oh—oh! *(She presses her hands tightly against her forehead and closes her eyes.)* Oh! Oh! What shall I do? What am I goin' ter do? *(She drops to her knees at the side of the bed, stretches out her arms and babbles hysterically.)* John! John! Yuh ain't goin' ter leave yuhre Marthy— Oh, John—don't leave me—don't! Thar ain't nobody else! John! Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! He's all I got—all that's left! Oh! Oh! Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! *(With mad fervor.)* Oh, Gawd, don't take him from me! *(Abruptly, from far off on the right, comes the sound of a train*

THE END OF THE TRAIL

whistle—very faint. MARTHA does not hear it.) John! open yuhre eyes an' look at me! Look at yuhre Marthy an' smile! (She jumps to her feet with clenched hands and an expression of tigerish challenge.) Thar ain't no Gawd! Thar ain't no Gawd! If—if thar is one he's a black-hearted divil! That's what he is! Curse Him—an' His world—an' all the people in it! (The whistle sounds again in the distance—a little louder this time.) Curse Him! Curse Him! Curse Him! (Again the whistle sounds. She pauses and listens—as though in a daze. A prolonged blast—and still louder. She realizes suddenly that the limited is coming up the canyon. She gives a gasp, jumps to the center table, turns down the oil lamp, then staggers to the window, right, and peers out. She stands there for a moment or two, then goes swiftly to the back of the room, picks up the red lantern and moves to the door, back. She puts her hand on the knob, as though to open it, then something impels her to face about. Her eyes rove about the room and she presents a picture of utter, tragic woe. The whistle again—still nearer—marked by a discernible canyon reverberation. She stands tense, listening and deliberating for a brief interval. Then hoarsely.) At—at the edge of the canyon—blowin' fer O'Fallon's— (Her eyes wander to the bed, and she stares fixedly at the still form on it. Suddenly she gives way to a series of prolonged, dry racking sobs. Presently she brings herself up short, and with a wild cry raises the lantern in the air, and dashes it down across the back of a chair. The light vanishes, the glass flies in all directions and the lantern falls to the floor with a dull thud. She moves unsteadily to the window, stands for a moment gazing out, then comes back to center, and clings to the table for support. The whistle sounds again—shrill and penetrating. A shaft of light shoots in the window—faint and eerie—and dances about the limited's whistle—quite near. The shaft of light grows larger and brighter. Suddenly it strikes her full in the face, revealing an expression which is a combination of insane hate and fear. It plays on her

face for several moments, then disappears. The roar of the oncoming train can now be heard. MARTHA gives way to an outburst of wild hysterical laughter. The train thunders past the house. A brief interval ensues, dominated by the roar of the flying train, then comes the sound of a tremendous crash, as it dives into the slide and is wrecked. MARTHA gives a piercing shriek, puts her hands over her ears, and sinks to the floor.)

CURTAIN

GEORGE WASHINGTON
AT THE DELAWARE

AN HISTORICAL PLAY

by PERCY MACKAYE

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NOTE.—"Washington at the Delaware" is an excerpt of Mr. MacKaye's Ballad Play, in three acts and a prologue, "Washington: The Man Who Made Us," published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York; and this Episode comprises one Action (the Ninth) selected from the fourteen Actions contained in the three-act play. *A note to this effect should be printed, at the head of the Cast of Characters, in all amateur performances given of this Action, and the author (from whom permission to act this play must first be obtained) requests that two copies of the program be sent, with press notices, to him at his address, Harvard Club, 27 West 44th Street, New York City.*

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

Walter Hampden, the distinguished actor, who created the title rôle in Mr. MacKaye's play, "Washington, the Man Who Made Us," gives the following advice to amateurs producing this episode: "The first suggestion to the Director is to read the text without analysis and try to catch his early strong impressions. Let him hold these and not depart from them. They will form the base of his work. With some thought and quiet meditation they will flower into the essentials which will stimulate his imagination to the discovery of all the organic details.

"Casting the parts is also important. Do not be too realistically historical. Appearance for the rôle is a secondary consideration. If it happens to go along with the things of more importance, power to project personality and the illusion of character, so much the better. Departures from age, stature, looks and voice are not of primary importance. If there be an exception it is, of course, in regard to the actor of Washington. Washington is so much a part of the visual memory of the people of this country that it is wise to favor physical suitability in this instance. The main elements to base a choice upon are audibility of voice, distinctness of enunciation, vitality and responsiveness of temperament, and that personal quality that spells character, by which I mean that sympathetic capacity to feel it and exhibit it.

"Think of contrasts of type for Paine and Monroe; the latter, moody, low-toned; Paine, keen-eyed, with an incisive utterance, and intellectual enthusiasm. Hamilton must impart a distinct sense of confident youth, so as to offset the heroic and mature Washington. Quilloquon may be almost anything that is racy of the soil, provided he be mellow and colorful. He should typify generations of retrospect and

have a spring in his step and an alertness of glance that suggest his relation to ages yet to come. Though he has music to sing, remember his rendition should not be operatic, but instinct with character. Let him keep to the time, yet half speak the song. Any clever boy and girl, not prettified, can pantomime sufficiently for the two children. They, too, should sing with naturalness and simplicity.

"Viewing this Action as a whole, it stands, coldly lighted and deeply shaded, enwrapped by the solemn bracing atmosphere of the Declaration of Independence. Quilloquon's ballad sets in fanciful way, with its wistful gayety and plaintive charm, the serious mood of the Action to follow. This Action again, before Hamilton's entrance, has a lighter quality than after, so let Monroe not be ponderous in his depression and let him and Paine keep this early part of the scene cheery with the 'gameness' of an invincible optimism. Emphasize, however, those details of business which indicate cold and physical suffering. The passage where they note Washington as he passes to and fro in the background must not be heavy in tone, but rather weighted by pauses, otherwise their play will detract from the force of Washington's method in the latter part of the scene.

"For the actor of Washington, I would merely suggest that he *do* as little as possible. Repose will give him strength and a reduction of facial play and gesture to a minimum will aid to render him heroic—and a hero in the fullest sense he must be without theatrical strut or pose.

"A final word for Mr. Director: Don't try to fix your methods of expression upon your actors, for they won't fit. Imprint your conception on their minds, inspire them with your enthusiasm, hold them together by authority of understanding rather than by discipline. Foster the growth of your ideas in them and their own as well, and eliminate as much detail as possible. There is always the one expressive detail which implies all the rest. Seek it."

And, concerning the costumes and lighting, Robert Edmond Jones, who is considered by many to be the foremost scenic artist in America, offers the following advice: "Use a

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

white floor-cloth. In the illustration, bare trees are suggested by strips of cloth, dyed dark gray and hanging in vertical folds from above the line of sight. They are touched with white where they meet the floor. Behind them the floor-cloth is draped over a flat board cut in the silhouette of a low hill; behind this again is a straight blue curtain or cyclorama.

"Paine, Monroe, Washington and Hamilton wear regimentals of buff and blue, stained and ragged, and three-cornered hats. Washington also wears a military cloak and great boots.

"The lighting of the scene is the most important element of the production. For this scene there are two kinds of light contrasted with each other; firelight and cold blue moonlight. The fire is suggested in this way: Half-burned logs of wood heaped together, so as to conceal electric bulbs dipped in yellow, red and blue, rightly proportioned. *No footlights*; no border lights in the foreground; hidden spotlights of dim cold blue shining obliquely down on the white floor-cloth. Rear border lights in blue, and a strip of blue lights concealed behind the hill to shine on the sky curtain. These last must be arranged on 'dimmers,' or otherwise to grow gradually brighter and brighter at the end of the scene. The sky-cloth is perforated with tiny holes; behind each perforation is an electric 'star.' The stars are used, of course, only at the end of the scene. Or the stars may be more simply rendered by small, three-pointed pieces of tinsel pinned to the curtain, unseen until the moment of illumination."

PROPERTY LIST

FOR THOMAS PAINE

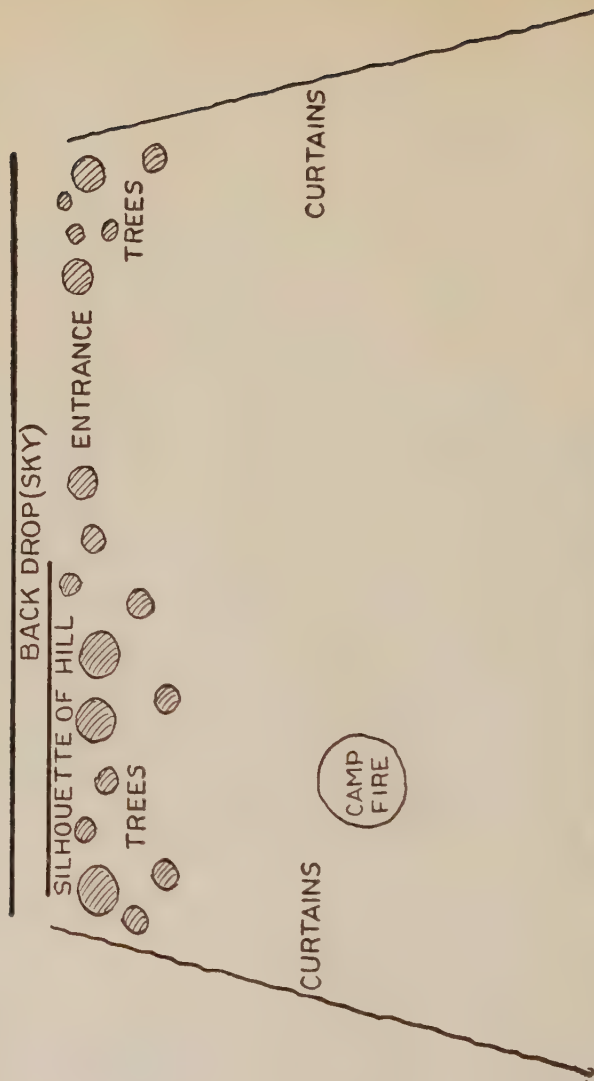
Musket

Small book

Pencil

FOR JAMES MONROE

Folded paper



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE"

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

CHARACTERS

THOMAS PAINE

LIEUT. JAMES MONROE

GEN. GEORGE WASHINGTON

COL. ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Voices of men (outside)

PLACE AND TIME: *By the Delaware River, above Trenton;
Christmas Night, 1776.*

SCENE: *An opening amid snow-laden woods by moonlight.*

The blue curtains have drawn back to the width of the full stage aperture, revealing a SENTINEL, in ragged American uniform, standing in the night near a low-burning camp fire (left).

The snow has ceased falling. The fire dimly lights by its gleam a space surrounded by vaguely discerned walls of snow-laden woods, except in the background. There—between trunks of trees, rising like columns of gray ice—an archlike opening gives glimpses of struggling moonlight and gusty, gray-black darkness, through which a low, muffled thudding and crackling murmur rise occasionally to the ear.

Holding for a moment his musket poised, the SENTINEL looks off (left), listening. Then, lowering his gun and turning to the fire, he crouches by it, blows his fingers, takes from within his tattered coat a little book, holds it open near the firelight and begins writing in it.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

While he does so, through the glooming aperture in the background, the tall, silhouetted form of WASHINGTON, in long military cloak, his hands gripped behind him, is seen to pace slowly past and disappear (right).

The SENTINEL stops writing, gesticulates to himself, muttering; then reads aloud from his book.

THE SENTINEL

"O ye, that love mankind! Ye that dare oppose not only tyranny but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the Old World is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. O, receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind!" (*Coughing slightly, he stares a moment in the fire: then writes again. In the background, the dim form of WASHINGTON, returning, paces past and disappears, left. Half rising now from his crouched posture, the SENTINEL reads again from his book in the firelight, with gesture as of ardent conversation with another.*) "To see it in our power to make a world happy, to teach mankind the art of being so, to exhibit on the theater of the universe a character hitherto unknown, and to have, as it were, a new creation entrusted to our hands—are honors that command reflection." (*Closing his book, he looks intently into the night. Then suddenly, dropping the book, he seizes up his gun, leaps to his feet and calls out:*) Who goes there?

A MAN'S VOICE (*answers from outside, left*)
Merry Christmas!

THE SENTINEL

Merry Christmas, yourself! (*A MAN limps wearily in, through a gap in the snow-covered evergreens. The firelight reveals him also forlornly clad in ragged regimentals. The SENTINEL half lowers his gun.*) What's your name, and allegiance?

THE MAN

Lieutenant James Monroe, of the United States.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

THE SENTINEL (*saluting—a bit slouchily, like a civilian*)

“Which are, and of right ought to be, free and independent!” Pass, Lieutenant Monroe, in the name of our immortal Declaration.

MONROE

Immortal, sir, let us hope, but *ought to be* isn’t *are* by a long shot—whatever Mr. Jefferson hath immortally declared for us.

(*Sitting on a rock by the fire, he examines his foot.*)

THE SENTINEL (*bending over him*)

Lord, lieutenant, your foot’s bloody—bleeding bad! Here, wait a minute. (*Tearing a strip from his own regimentals, he kneels down beside MONROE.*) You need bandaging.

MONROE

Thanks, friend. We all do—in this uniform. (*Behind them the shadowy form of WASHINGTON paces past again, and noiselessly disappears. While the SENTINEL is stooping over, wrapping his companion’s foot in bandages, MONROE’S hand—resting on the book—raises it. Glancing curiously at the open page, he mutters:*) Hello, what’s here? (*The SENTINEL looks up an instant, but goes on immediately with his occupation. MONROE reads aloud:*)

“These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered.” (*Turning to the front of the book, he looks closely and reads:*) “Tom Paine: His Note Book.”—Great Cæsar! Where did this come from?

THE SENTINEL

From a hater of Cæsar—out of my breast pocket, sir.

MONROE

Yours! You—Thomas Paine, the author of “Common-sense”?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

PAINE

Unauthorized by His Majesty: that's me.

MONROE (*rising and saluting*)

Why, sir, permit me to salute—the Revolution! 'Tis a privilege to meet Public Opinion face to face.

PAINE

You meet just a sentinel at his post, sir. 'Tis a privilege of serving Liberty, to inquire: "Who goes there?"

MONROE

Your inquiry will burn the ears of kings till their doomsday, Mr. Paine. Your challenge rings over the Atlantic. For my part I should like to see it made the Atlantic doctrine—No passing for Old World tyrants this side of the world!

PAINE

And why not doctrine for t'other side, too, Mr. Monroe?

MONROE (*sitting again*)

Well, sir—a touch of modesty. I administer my doctrine by the dose—half a world at a time.

PAINE

Not me, lieutenant. My mother didn't bear me modest, nor twins; so, following her maternal example, I never give birth to a principle by hemispheres.

MONROE (*holding one foot and twining*)

Well and good, Mr. Paine, but hadn't we better confine our universal dreams to gypsy camps—considering our style of bed to-night?

PAINE (*humming the words*)

"O, what care I for a goose-feather bed
With the sheet turned down—"

(*Breaking off with a short laugh.*) Ha! "Raggle-taggle"; that's the tune of revolution, sir.

MONROE (*wearily*)

Oh, I don't know! There's times I almost think we de-

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

serve goose feathers—and tar, too—for such loyalty as ours.

PAINE (*sharply*)

What's that! Is that your ripe judgment of our cause?

MONROE

No, sir, not ripe—just rotten. I'm dog-tired—tired of failure. The game's up! We know our dreams—but look at the facts.

PAINE

Well—what facts?

MONROE

Listen! (*He pauses a moment.*) You hear that sound? (*They both listen in silence. Shadowy in the background, the form of WASHINGTON repasses and disappears.*)

PAINE

You mean the river there—the ice rattling?

MONROE

Yes: the death rattle of our rebellion. I mean, that the Delaware River can tell our story. That's us—the American army. Last summer, what were we? The warm, quick stream of our country's passion, welling like hot blood, pouring out of the hills—the turbulent current of a continent. And now, in December—what now, ha? That's us—out there: a death-cold stream, congealing while we move: a current choked up with the ice of its own broken heart—any hour to be buried under, gone, stone-cold as this river bank to-night.

PAINE (*humming, as he fondles his musket*)

"For to-night I shall sleep in a cold open field"—(*Speaking.*) And those facts, lieutenant? Skip the metaphors.

MONROE

Facts, sir? The facts are disaster and retreat. At Brooklyn Heights—failure, retreat; New York—the same; Fort Washington, Fort Lee—lost, both; the Hudson—

lost; and here now for months in Jersey—ignominious retreat: deserters, dropping off like rats from a wreck; militia without honor; officers without obedience; a Congress that votes battalions, but no money—and this nearly two years since Bunker Hill! So here, Mr. Paine, this Christmas night, while the Hessian hirelings are rum drinking over the river there in Trenton—these are the *facts*: To expel from America His Majesty's twenty-five thousand regulars, stuffed with plum pudding—here we are: twenty-four hundred retreating frozen-bellied gypsies!

PAINE (*quickly*)

And one general.

MONROE (*rising slowly, speaks with quiet emotion*)

Aye, sir—one general. After all, for us, I guess that's the *only* fact. For, if needs be, we'll follow that one the gypsy path to hell.

PAINE (*with a gesture of silence, points to the background*)
Shh!

(*Silently, once more, in dim silhouette, the form of WASHINGTON paces past and is gone. For a moment, they stand watching, motionless. Then MONROE speaks, under his breath.*)

MONROE

Him?—Is this camp fire *his*?

PAINE (*nodding*)

I'm his sentinel here.

MONROE

I bear a dispatch to him.

PAINE

Not now: not for half an hour. That's my orders. He's thinking. He thinks—alone.

MONROE

And walks like that?

PAINE

Sometimes. Sometimes he just stands—like a tree—all night.

MONROE

What, and sleeps—standing?

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

PAINE

Not sleeps, I guess; though often his eyes are closed. He calls it—taking his cat naps. And sometimes he takes 'em walking.

MONROE

Walking!

PAINE

Like we saw—there.

MONROE (*taking out a folded paper*)

But this dispatch, Mr. Paine?

PAINE

Follow me, sir: I'll take you to Colonel Hamilton. Since the general met him in New York, he's made a son of him.—He's over yonder, with General Knox.

MONROE (*taking PAINE's hand in the dim light, follows him, limping*)

Some future Christmas, Mr. Paine, we must resume our fireside conversation on the doctrine of hemispheres.

PAINE

Hemispheres?—No, sir: give me—globes!

(*They disappear in the darkness. After a moment—pacing past again in the background—the huge form of WASHINGTON pauses, comes slowly down half way to the fire and stands there. In long military cloak, three-cornered hat, and great boots, his hands still clutched behind him—his posture is erect as an Indian. Around his throat is a piece of woollen cloth. His eyes are intently fixed, his lips compressed with painful tightness. He remains perfectly motionless. Vaguely the sounds of wind and river ice deepen the silence of their pausings. Soon, from the right, very quietly, the slight small form of a young man comes into the gleam of the fire. He is in uniform, shabby but borne with alert distinction. He passes over to the fire and waits there. As he crosses the gaze of WASHINGTON, the eyes of the latter follow him and continue to look at him for a moment, before he speaks in a tone hoarse with cold.*)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

WASHINGTON

Ah! Hamilton—you?

HAMILTON

Yes, your Excellency.

WASHINGTON

Are the boats secured?

HAMILTON

Yes, your Excellency.

WASHINGTON

All?

HAMILTON

Yes, sir.

WASHINGTON (*murmurs*)

Ah! (*Slowly, he begins to pace again. HAMILTON waits, near the fire. Soon WASHINGTON speaks again, abrupt.*)

Oh! Alexander!

HAMILTON

What, sir?

WASHINGTON

You dispatched my letter to Mt. Vernon?

HAMILTON

To Lady Washington: Yes, sir.

WASHINGTON (*murmuring low, as he paces*)

You're a good boy—you're a good boy— (*After a moment, pausing again, he speaks with staccato sharpness.*)

Well?—Well? Your report!

HAMILTON

This message, by Lieutenant Monroe, from General Gates at Bristol. Shall I read it, sir?

WASHINGTON

No: give me the gist.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

HAMILTON

General Gates has received your orders. He understands it is your plan to strike the Hessians to-night at Trenton, with five coöperating divisions, commanded severally by yourself, himself, Generals Ewing, Putnam, and Griffin. Accordingly, he has dispatched General Cadwalader to the river.

WASHINGTON

Well?

HAMILTON

General Cadwalader has looked at the river.

WASHINGTON

Has he!—Well?

HAMILTON

He considers the floating ice impassable—

WASHINGTON

Considers!—

HAMILTON

The chances desperate, and he is gone back to Bristol.

WASHINGTON

Gone back to *Brimstone*! Let him sit there and broil his rump!—What else?

HAMILTON

Another message from General Gates, by Captain Wilkinson.

WASHINGTON

We are twice favored.—Well?

HAMILTON

General Gates himself has set out for Philadelphia to inform Congress—

WASHINGTON

Inform Congress—what of?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

HAMILTON

That he disapproves your plan and cannot coöperate.

WASHINGTON

Ah! (*After a pause.*) What further messages?

HAMILTON

From General Putnam, at Philadelphia.

WASHINGTON (*quickly*)

What's Put say?

HAMILTON

He regrets his division cannot march to-night.

WASHINGTON (*slowly*)

Old Put says that.—Well!—Next?

HAMILTON

General Ewing regrets the ice, but will try whatever seems most practical—in the morning.

WASHINGTON

Try! He'd better try lard, and fry in his own fat! That's practical for corn pone—ha!—in the *morning*! (WASHINGTON'S features contract, and he gnaws fiercely the edge of his hand, before speaking again.) So: that makes three divisions time-stalled—useless. (*He glances slowly at HAMILTON.*) And the fourth—?

HAMILTON

General Griffin sends word—
(*He pauses.*)

WASHINGTON

What are *his* regrets?

HAMILTON

He regrets his necessity to abandon New Jersey altogether.

WASHINGTON (*lifting off his hat, raises it high aloft*)

Jehovah, God of chariots! And *this* is the thunder of

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

Thy captains! (*Dashing his hat to the ground, he grinds his boot upon it.*) Blithering skulkgudgeons! These are my fighting generals! (*An immense shudder wrenches his body. Controlling a sharp spasm, his face grows marble. Stooping, he takes up the crumpled hat and holds it in silence; then, slowly turning his look from the hat to HAMILTON'S face, he speaks with tense quiet.*) Alexander: not a word of this! You understand?

HAMILTON

Not a word, your Excellency.

WASHINGTON

Your report, sir, is satisfactory. At midnight, our division will cross the Delaware—alone.

HAMILTON (*with quiet emotion*)

Nay, sir: not alone.

WASHINGTON

I said—ours alone. What other forces are left to attend us?

HAMILTON

The Ages, your Excellency: the forces that prevail over river barriers: there, sir, still flows—the Rubicon.

WASHINGTON (*hoarsely*)

Nay, my boy—not so classic. The Delaware will do, for to-night. 'Tis no Cæsar stands in my boots. (*With smoldering fire, that dartles, flames and then bursts.*) But 'tis Cæsar, I reckon, who camps over there with his legions: a Cæsar, hog Latin from Hanover, who would make the Atlantic his channel—who hires his own German breed to help suppress English freedom in both England and America, making his chancellors his apes and his commoners his minions. I'd rather you called me Hannibal-in-a-cocked-hat than such a Hessian Roman!

HAMILTON (*with flitting smile*)

I am well corrected, sir. I cannot gainsay—the cocked hat. (*With swift ardor, going near to him.*) But oh, my

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

dear general, I want you only to know my utter conviction of this night!

WASHINGTON (*looking at him—slowly*)

Your conviction, son?

HAMILTON

This night is the beginning of the world.—Darkness was over the face of the deep, and He said, "Let there be light!"

WASHINGTON (*murmurs*)

And there was light.

HAMILTON

And there was light!

WASHINGTON

Without form and void—and after that—light and order.

HAMILTON

Order—and organic structure: a new world—a new-built unity—a new self-government above warring tribes—a commonwealth above kings—and its name, *America!*

WASHINGTON

You are young—and you have seen it.

HAMILTON (*ardently*)

I *see* it, sir!

WASHINGTON

I am getting old—but I too have seen it—darkly. Old eyes and young must work together, boy. Will finds its way.

HAMILTON

And the will is here.

WASHINGTON

Ah?—Where?

HAMILTON (*with a reverent smile*)

Under that crumpled hat, sir.

GEORGE WASHINGTON AT THE DELAWARE

WASHINGTON (*smiling back faintly—speaks, after a pause*)
The boats are ready?

HAMILTON
On the face of the deep.

WASHINGTON
Over there—no crossing back. Over there—are the looted homes of freemen, and the Hessian looters—keeping the birth of Christ, there. Over that water, my boy, is our final stake: 'tis fight to a finish.

HAMILTON
And fight—for the beginning: our commonwealth above kings!

WASHINGTON
In the beginning—there was a word spoken—a watchword—and the stars held their watch ever after.
(*From the distance, on the right, a single faint bugle note is heard.*)

HAMILTON
O sir, yes! Our watchword: the men are waiting for it.

WASHINGTON (*mutters, looking off*)
No stars yet to-night!

HAMILTON (*with fervor*)
You will give it, sir—you alone. I'll go tell them. I beg of you, sir—the watchword!

WASHINGTON (*continues muttering to himself*)
Above warring tribes. Out of the void—a form. And there was light of stars—and order. Void, and then—victory!

HAMILTON
Sir—the watchword.

WASHINGTON (*to HAMILTON, very quietly*)
Victory, or death.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

HAMILTON (*murmuring low*)

Victory or death. (*Then, swiftly in silence going toward the dimness, right, he speaks in vibrant tone:*) Victory or death!

(*As he disappears, the voice of TOM PAINE answers from farther off: "Victory or death!" Still farther, then, in the distance, other VOICES call faintly to each other: "Victory or death!" These VOICES are still continuing, when once more a far bugle is heard. WASHINGTON stirs slightly, clutching his hands before him. Now the bugle is answered by another, and WASHINGTON tightens the great joints of his hands, and breathes heavily. And now, through the dark, increasingly, the upblowing notes of bugles rise, like irises of sound. And as they rise, the gray of gust-blurred moonlight in the background clears to a pallid blue, which deepens and—filling swiftly with stars—takes on a glowing intensity of azure. And now the bugles—as many as the stars—magnify their blaring notes to a martial revelry of music, crashing the dark with their silver and brazen peals. Staring upward in the midst of this sound and the color behind him, WASHINGTON in the foreground, raises his arms in a gesture immense and terrible—his voice breaking with sharp joy, as he cries hoarsely aloud:*)

WASHINGTON

Victory! Lord God of battles—victory!

CURTAIN

· SOCIETY NOTES

A COMEDY OF MANNERS

by DUFFY WEST

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SOCIETY NOTES

Miss West, the author of "Society Notes," gives in such detail the stage directions and "business" for her play that it is unnecessary here to offer you any further instruction concerning its presentation. However, if your equipment does not permit as elaborate a production as the script calls for, there are several modifications that may be employed without lessening its effect to any extent. For instance, a view of the sun room is merely an atmospheric touch, not essential to the action; a door, right, in the back wall, is sufficient. If your lighting system is such that it will not "carry" the various lamps, and the fireplace effect, these also may be dispensed with and only the borders and footlights used. The tuning-up of the band and the dance music may be simulated with a Victrola.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR MRS. SEDGEWICK

List of guests

Tray of calling cards

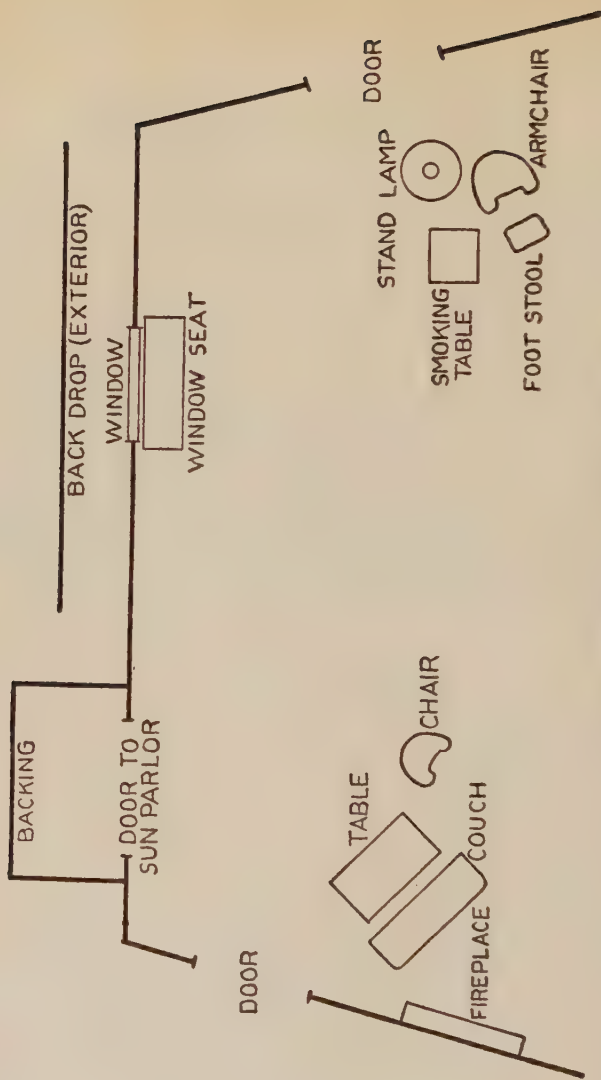
Menu

FOR MISS FOUNTAIN

Notebook

Pencil

Typewriting paper



THE SCENE FLOT FOR "SOCIETY NOTES"

SOCIETY NOTES

CHARACTERS

MARY SEDGEWICK
REGINALD STAUNTON
MRS. SEDGEWICK
MISS FLORRIE FOUNTAIN
MR. SEDGEWICK
DR. GLEN CORRE

SCENE: *The interior of a handsome morning room in the home of the Sedgewicks. In the back wall, left of center, is a leaded casement window with a window seat. Right of center is a broad entrance into a sun room which has unseen exits, right and left. In the left and right walls, up stage, are doors. In the right wall, down stage, is a fireplace. A couch with cushions half faces the fireplace. Behind the couch stands a table with twin lamps, and with a comfortable chair pushed up against one end. On the left side of the room stands a group composed of an arm-chair, a footstool, smoking table and standing lamp. Chairs are comfortably and conveniently placed. The room is paneled in deep ivory and hung with English chintz. Flowers stand on tables, mantel, everywhere in great profusion.*

The action of the play takes place in the hour preceding the ball, which the Sedgewicks are giving to introduce their daughter MARY to society.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. Immediately after MARY and STAUNTON enter from the sun room, disputing heatedly. MARY is a beautiful girl of twenty with a spirited manner whose expression suggests boredom tinged with sarcasm, incompatible with her years. She is wearing a

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

simple house dress and slippers and stockings of gold and her hair is carefully dressed. STAUNTON is in conventional evening clothes. He is an exceedingly well-groomed, heavy-set man in his late thirties. His manner is self-confident and tremendously conceited.

MARY

You may as well run along and amuse yourself in the billiard room until the ball begins. I must go and slip on my dress, and we're not getting any further in this argument.

STAUNTON

Let's keep it up a bit longer. I haven't begun to show my strength.

MARY

I appreciate your coming early to add the last touch to the success of the evening. But I tell you once and forever, Mr. Reginald Staunton, I will never marry you, never, never, never.

STAUNTON

And I tell you, you will marry me, Miss Mary Sedgewick. Your mother wants you to.

MARY

My mother wouldn't have to live with you. I would. My mother and I don't agree on most subjects, anyway.

STAUNTON

You're the first woman I've pleaded with in all these years.

MARY

That's the chief reason I won't listen to you. Those other women have spoiled you and petted you and given in to you until you haven't a shred of respect left for any of them.

STAUNTON

I have for you.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY

You wouldn't, if I yielded.

STAUNTON (*advancing toward her*)

Try me.

MARY (*retreating*)

And be victim two hundred and twenty-seven? You underestimate my powers of resistance, Mr. Staunton.

STAUNTON

No, I don't think I do. That's what attracts me so tremendously, I believe.

MARY

Of course it attracts you. You like my line. It's something new. But I'm looking ahead to the long, long evenings when I'd be something old, and you and your gray roadster would seek refuge from boredom at any other doorway but your own. I'd be reduced to being a married vamp. Hateful creatures!

STAUNTON

Why should there be those evenings of boredom for people like you and me? We can take our pick of the amusements of the world, cruise, travel, when we tire of things around here and—of each other. (*He sits on the sofa and pulls her down beside him.*) Come, what do you say? Let's announce it to-night at your ball. Think how your mother would love it.

MARY

Isn't it a pity she can't have you for herself? No, I won't take you until I've gone on a bit of a search. (*Cynical but wistful.*) I've heard there are married couples who like to spend those long, long evenings alone, at home—together. Incredible, isn't it?

STAUNTON

Tommyrot! What's life for, if not to pack in as many good times as a man has the money to pay for? What can have started your mother's daughter off on such a

tangent? Are you in love with another man, some queer duck we none of us know? (*He looks at her shrewdly.*) By Jove, I believe that's it. Who is he? (*Grinly taking her hands and turning her towards him.*) No matter! He won't get you. I never wanted anything yet that I couldn't get, and I want you.

MARY (*shakes off his hands and rises*)

Wrong again. He's not a man, he's an ideal, and I shan't marry until I find him.

(*The voices of MRS. SEDGEWICK and MISS FOUNTAIN are heard off stage.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Really astonishing. Quite, quite ravishing.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, it all takes ability, real executive ability, but I—

MARY (*runs to door, left*)

Oh, glory, there comes mother and her beloved Society Notes. I can't stand any more of that twaddle. (*She points to the door, right.*) If you go through that door, the butler will give you an appetizer for the evening's bliss. (*Pretends to raise a glass to her lips.*) See you later.

(*MARY goes off, left, and STAUNTON, right.*)

(*MRS. SEDGEWICK and MISS FOUNTAIN enter from the sun room. MRS. SEDGEWICK is a portly, commanding person, still conscious of her corsets, and gowned in full evening regalia, with magnificent jewels. She uses her lorgnettes as a weapon of offense. MISS FOUNTAIN is a large, thin, voluble woman, past her first youth, sprightly, fervent, almost kittenish when she is with the right set. Her face in repose shows the strain of constant enthusiasm over other people's good times. She is dressed in a very fussy evening dress, feathers, fringe, beads dangling indiscriminately. The fact of her having been well born gives her a certain ease of manner with the clients whose careers*

SOCIETY NOTES

she helps mold. She is the Society Editress for the Morning Star.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Charming, exquisite, ravishing. Marvelous to me how you accomplish these results. *C'est épouvante!* Such atmosphere, such unique atmosphere. I feel this will be *the ball of the season.*

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, I am sure dear Mary's début ball is going to be a great success.

(MRS. SEDGEWICK moves about the room, complacently touching things into place, glancing with satisfaction over the cards that came with the flowers.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

No expense has been spared. All the right people are coming and none of the wrong ones have been asked.

MISS FOUNTAIN

So wise of you, dear Mrs. Sedgewick. In these Bolshevistic times you stand for Society's Rock of Ages.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, I must admit I am very strict on the subject of exclusiveness, very strict indeed. I cannot understand some of our acquaintances who open their doors to any one. I tell Mary every day it is not necessary for her to know every one who wants to know her.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Certainly not. The dear child has been so carefully reared. She is even a bit aloof with me at times.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

For instance, this Dr. Corre, a young doctor who attends Mr. Sedgewick. A very estimable young man in his way, no doubt, but not our kind at all; Mary had to have him invited. To my surprise he sent his regrets.

MISS FOUNTAIN

You'll occasionally find that some of these people have the

good sense not to come where they know they'll feel out of place.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Exactly. But Mary is a bit—er—what shall I say—*difficile*. She refuses to understand why some people belong and others do not. You simply cannot imagine the people she wanted to insist on asking here to-night. Some very queer ones indeed. I had to be very firm. Old acquaintances of Sunday-school days, women she met in street fairs, bazaars, work for poor babies—she wanted them all. The child has no sense of discretion. It's my belief anyway that most women go into work for poor babies for the sole purpose of meeting society folk like us on an equal basis. Personally, I was very careful only to work with people I knew. Climbers disgust me so.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Discretion will come to Mary in time, dear lady. You will mold her, never fear. And she is so ravishing, so beautiful, that very soon I know some marvelous Prince Charming will open his eyes to the privilege of belonging to the American Noblesse.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

There are several on the waiting list. One whom I specially favor. Mr. Staunton.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*giving a squeal of delight at the great name*)

How splendid! Dear Mrs. Sedgewick, mayn't I just hint at it? Something like this. (*Half closes her eyes and composes.*) During the gayeties of the evening, one of our most delightful and eligible dancing men was allowed to enjoy a great many dances with the *débutante*, with whom he also led the cotillion later in the evening after the inner man had been satisfied.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Delightful! That will be just enough.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Dear lady, how grateful society should be that it has such stalwart bulwarks as you to ward off the vulgar invasion of the masses. (MRS. SEDGEWICK *smooths down her portly hips doubtfully*. MISS FOUNTAIN *hurriedly covers her slip*.) Figuratively, I mean. Metaphorically speaking, of course. As I composed myself to write the account of your ball for the Sunday papers, for once duty and pleasure went hand in hand. It was a joy to write about the affair, the house, the sumptuousness—and dear Mr. Sedgewick. (*At the mention of Mr. SEDGEWICK's name his wife shows distinct uneasiness.*) He is always such a charming host in spite of his delicate health. Rheumatism, is it not?

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes—er rheumatism. A very unusual kind.

MISS FOUNTAIN

Inflammatory?

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, very! He will strain every effort to be present; he is looking forward to the ball with such pleasure. He dotes on Mary. We could not make the list exclusive enough to suit him.

MISS FOUNTAIN

So thoughtful, so aloof, so untiring in his efforts for others. He really should be careful of himself for the good of the community. The true aristocrat.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*suddenly businesslike*)

Miss Fountain, you brought the account of the ball with you? That is as much as you could write before it takes place?

MISS FOUNTAIN (*produces a sheaf of typewritten pages out of a satin bag*)

Here it is almost as you dictated it to me. All I have to do is to fill in a list of the guests and their gowns.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*goes to the table and takes a piece of notepaper out of the drawer*)

Here is the list of guests whose names I want published. The names underlined are the people whose costumes and appearance I want specially emphasized. You understand, I know.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*takes the page and glances over it rapidly*)
Surely, dear lady.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*looks over MISS FOUNTAIN'S shoulder*)

For example, people like the Browns or the Jenkses or the Pickleheimers. One must ask them, you know, but you needn't put them in the notes, no matter how often they say good evening to you.

MISS FOUNTAIN

I understand perfectly. The effect of an affair on the public mind is so enhanced by the proper treatment of these details. (*She finishes looking over the list hurriedly, nodding her head with satisfaction, before she stuffs it into her bag.*) Such a satisfactory list. You have a flair, a real genius, for social subtleties.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*squeezes MISS FOUNTAIN'S hand*)

Dear child, I do appreciate your interest.

MISS FOUNTAIN

And I yours. Now I'm off through the rooms for a last loving survey, before the guests arrive. Au revoir.

(*MISS FOUNTAIN goes into the sun room, leaving MRS. SEDGEWICK alone on the stage reading the typewritten pages with an air of great complacency. MARY enters, door, left. Her manner is listless, almost unhappy. Her attitude toward her mother is careless to the point of indifference. The mother's manner is that of a general who expects his troops to rebel on the eve of battle. During the following scene MRS. SEDGEWICK is glancing over the typed papers when she is not looking at MARY.*)

SOCIETY NOTES

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*looking at her daughter in dismay*)
Why aren't you dressed?

MARY

Plenty of time. All I have to do is to slip into my gown.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*nervously*)

Do you know if your father is ready?

MARY

I just left him. Dr. Corre is giving him a last shot so that he can do the family proud.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary! No well-bred girl talks that way about her father.

MARY

Who said I was well-bred? I wouldn't be accepted in any exclusively pedigreed animal show—after the judges had seen father.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary!!

MARY (*carelessly*)

Sorry. Won't do it again. Dr. Corre assures me that father will hold up for at least five hours. Quite a record for him, isn't it? (*Pause.*) I asked Dr. Corre to try to come to-night.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

He probably regretted in the first place because he knew he would not fit in. I only consented to ask him because he is around your father so much.

MARY

You were smarter than I was. He refused again. Said he wasn't interested. (*Wearily.*) I don't suppose I interest him either for that matter.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*scornfully*)

You interest him? The very idea! Really, Mary, considering your rearing, you are very hard to understand at times.

MARY

Yes, all things considered, I am a misfit. I never felt it so acutely as I do to-night. All this fussing and fuming and wasted energy and not one bit of pure happiness or real kindness in the lot. I'm bored to extinction before I begin. I'm not Glen Corre's type. I've never been taught to think. Something like Reg Staunton will be my fate, I suppose.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*happy, eager, excited*)

Has he said anything?

MARY (*scornfully*)

Several times. Any time I give him the chance.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*bitter and frustrated*)

Most of the girls who are coming here to-night would give their souls for your chance.

MARY

He'd love that. I wish the nastiest six could have him. That would about satisfy him—for a time. Selfish old beast!

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Love often comes after marriage.

MARY

I know. Love for another woman.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary, one of the chief things you have to learn is not to let your interests roam too far outside your own circle. Go to concerts and lectures; be a patroness as often as you please, if the list is an exclusive one; have your little charities—

MARY (*explodes*)

Oh, Lord!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*rises and folds the papers indignantly*)

Really I refuse to stand this insolence of yours another minute.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY (*her voice suddenly softens with contrition and she lays her hands on her mother's shoulders*)

Mother dear, I'm sorry if I hurt you. If you would only try to understand me, we could be so happy together.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*blindly obdurate, goes right on*)

After all that is being done for you, your tea, your clothes, your jewels, and now this ball, all for you—

MARY (*repulsed, gives a hard laugh*)

For me? What a joke! If you didn't have me to give a ball for, you'd find another débutante to give one for, the swellest on your list. That's the way all the elderly society fans keep things going for themselves after they've outlived their own youth.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

I should hate to have Miss Fountain find you in this mood.

MARY

Your friend would be too tactful to notice it. (*She takes the papers from her mother and looks them over mischievously.*) Lord! what a line to write. Covering people's defects with twaddle and exalting their commonplaceness into virtue. What tommyrot!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*sarcastic*)

You seem to find them interesting, nevertheless.

MARY

I want to see how your friend Miss Fountain camouflaged the past records of our family this time. I am looking to see whether she touched on the career of my maternal great-uncle. She is such a shark for ancestry, you know.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*in vexed alarm*)

Mary, how dare you recall that? Give me those papers this instant.

MARY

Oh, yes, here it is. (*She pretends to read.*) And it came to pass that Ben Higgins, the great-uncle of the débutante

on the mother's side, while spending an enforced rest cure at the State Penitentiary, became so expert in making shoes that on regaining his liberty, he went into the business. And he did teach his brother, Josiah Higgins, the débütante's grandfather, the art, and these two together did roll up the tremendous fortune which in time attracted the attention of one Percival Sedgewick, impoverished and dissipated aristocrat, and he did marry Sarah Ann Higgins and these two begat—

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*making for MARY and the papers in a towering rage*)

Mary, I insist—such thoughts—such language—

MARY (*waving her off laughingly*)

The language is Biblical. The thoughts aren't as ridiculous as this really reads. Listen to this. (*She reads.*) "Balls may come and balls may go, but *The Ball* of the season was given last night." (*Interpolates.*) And the evening is still young. (*Skims down the pages.*) "Princely host"—(*Grins.*) "Loving understanding"—How delicious! "Twining garlands of orchids punctuated by roses; Mrs. Sedgewick is an expert in flora and fauna, flower culture being her great delight in summer." Oh, what a naughty lie, mummy dear, when you don't even know the difference between a larkspur and a skylark.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*snatches the papers from MARY*)

You really are too exasperating. Go and dress. Here comes your father, and I've had about enough.

(CORRE ushers in MR. SEDGEWICK, left, ready for the festivities. CORRE is a clean-cut, humorous, attractive type of young man, dressed in well made business clothes. SEDGEWICK is an emaciated, trembling, repulsive wreck of a man in irreproachable evening dress. He moves across the stage haltingly, with the slithering walk of a man suffering from locomotor ataxia. He drops into the chair next to the smoking table. MARY is standing near the fireplace, and her mother is near her, the papers still fluttering in her hands. During the following scene, when—

SOCIETY NOTES

ever CORRE is not in the action, his eyes involuntarily seek MARY, who stubbornly refuses to meet his gaze. She watches her father with a sort of pitiful amusement. MRS. SEDGEWICK'S manner turns to one of strained politeness, for company only.)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Good evening, Percival. Good evening, Dr. Corre. Every one is ready now but Mary. I hope your—er—rheumatism is better, Percival?

MR. SEDGEWICK (*looks at his wife with an ironic leer. His voice is cultured but snarling. He has no company manners*)

My rheumatism? Ha! Ha! Rheumatism! Well I can tell you this damned excitement doesn't do it any good. Ugh, that dress you have on! Designed for a woman half your age and a beauty at that. (*He rakes her with a glare.*) And it doesn't even look fresh. Your things never do. (*Waving his hands.*) Where'd all these flowers come from? Ugly lot!

MRS. SEDGEWICK

From friends. (*She lays Society Notes on the table and hands him a trayful of cards.*) Here are the cards.

(*SEDGEWICK sits looking over the cards with grunts of disapproval. MRS. SEDGEWICK crosses over to CORRE, who is leaning against the back of a chair, left, looking at MARY. She speaks to him in a low voice.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

How is your patient to-night, Dr. Corre?

CORRE

Unusually well, Mrs. Sedgewick. He will hold up splendidly, I think.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

If you could only give him something to keep him from being offensive to people.

CORRE

You are asking a great deal of science, Mrs. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK

Rotten lot of cards. Is that all? You never did know how to make the best people your friends. Where's your menu? (MRS. SEDGEWICK *hands it to him. He looks at it and gives a cry of rage.*) In all these years haven't I taught you that it's utterly vulgar as well as suicidal to serve lobster mayonnaise and ice cream at the same time? I never read anything as absolutely common as the selection of this menu. Your work, I suppose.

CORRE (*comes over to him and taps him on the shoulder*)

It isn't wise to excite yourself unnecessarily, Mr. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK (*shouts*)

Unnecessarily? My God! man, when the favors look like a Christmas fête for charity children, and the flowers look like the festooning in a barroom—and—and—where is the list of guests? (*He half rises from the chair, his feet slide about helplessly, and he subsides again. MRS. SEDGEWICK hands him the list. He looks it over, snorting with scorn.*)

SEDGEWICK

Bunch of muckers. Not many people fit to associate with these days.

(MARY, *who has watched the scene in ironic silence, suddenly chuckles out loud. Her father glares around at her.*)

SEDGEWICK

I'd like to be amused. Give me something to laugh at. Tell me the joke.

MARY

It would take too long. I'd have to review the entire family history. I'm off now to get into my frock. Prepare for a vision when I return.

(*She goes out, left.*)

SOCIETY NOTES

SEDGEWICK

Insolent little devil. But she shows class. (*He looks at his wife.*) Takes after my people. (*He throws out his sunken chest.*) I tell you, breeding shows every time. (*He rises with much difficulty but ultimate success.*) Going to view the rest of the mismanagements of this party. (*He totters toward the sun room.*)

CORRE

Follow my directions as closely as you can, Mr. Sedgewick. And if you need me, I'll be at my home this evening.

SEDGEWICK

Stay for the ball, Corre. (*Sarcastically.*) Awfully amusing. I'll give you pointers.

CORRE

Thanks. Not this evening. Work to do at home. (*As SEDGEWICK reaches the sun room he bumps into Miss FOUNTAIN, who, notebook in hand, is going in the opposite direction. She overflows effusively.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

How lovely! Everything so chaste, so charming, so rav—

SEDGEWICK (*grunts*)

. . . d'evening.

(*They go off in opposite directions.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre.

CORRE

Yes, Mrs. Sedgewick?

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Can't you make him a bit steadier just for this evening?

CORRE

I've stimulated him as much as I dare, Mrs. Sedgewick.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*gives a long sigh*)

How long does a man in his condition usually last?

CORRE

Your husband has unusual powers of resistance, really marvelous vitality. And he responds splendidly to medical treatment. I've seen men in his condition last for years. (MRS. SEDGEWICK *gives another long sigh.*) Good night, Mrs. Sedgewick, I hope the evening will be everything you can wish for.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*perfunctorily*)

So sorry you're not coming.

CORRE

My evenings are very full. However, I appreciate your kindness.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*patronizing, as if she were announcing something to the old family butler*)

You are so deeply interested in the family that I know you will like to hear that we shall have a very pleasant announcement to make in the course of a few days. My daughter and a man in—er—her own circle. You've heard his name, no doubt. Mr. Reginald Staunton.

CORRE (*stung out of his usual indifference*)

Your daughter Mary to that man Staunton? Mrs. Sedgewick, surely you can't mean it?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*mistaking his repugnance for awe*)

Yes, isn't it lovely? Everything a mother could wish for her child. And I know she will find complete happiness in remaining in the same station of life to which she has been accustomed.

CORRE

I doubt it. However, I am only your medical adviser and I fear I am limited to that.

(MISS FOUNTAIN *enters from the sun room and MARY from the door, left, at the same time. MISS FOUNTAIN passes CORRE with a chilly little nod, which he returns coolly. MARY, radiant in evening dress, advances to the center of the room. CORRE, after one glance at her, turns*

SOCIETY NOTES

his back and stands looking out of window. MISS FOUNTAIN appraises MARY with gasps of delight.)

MISS FOUNTAIN

How chic—how spirituelle—how ravishing—really, ravishing is the only word for it, is it not, Mrs. Sedgewick?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*who has regained her complacency with the advent of her chief ally*)

It's from Paris. An original Cheruit model. Turn around, Mary, so that Miss Fountain can get the full details.

(MARY *stands stock-still.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Ravishing! Simply and exquisitely ravishing.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Yes, isn't it? Turn around, Mary.

MARY (*does not budge*)

Mother, I am sure Miss Fountain's marvelous imagination can fill in the details. That wonderful imagination! Where should we be without it?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*hurriedly takes MISS FOUNTAIN by the arm and beats a retreat toward the sun room*)

Come, my dear, I want to explain that last figure again.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*her voice floating back as they go off through the sun room*)

Oh, yes. Where the buds form a circle, and the dancing men revolve—

(CORRE *still stands looking out of the window. MARY crosses to the fireplace, and looks at herself rather sadly in the mirror above it. Suddenly she speaks in a tone entirely different from that she used before, a wistful, girlish, musical voice.*)

MARY

Don't you wish to see this ravishing sight, Dr. Corre?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

CORRE (*turns slowly with his hands shielding his eyes as if from the sun*)

I'm not keen about being ravished. It's too devastating.

MARY

Bear it like a man. Just one look.

(CORRE takes his hands away from his eyes, looks at her squarely, and continues to look and look until she grows uncomfortable.)

MARY

That will do. You've acquitted yourself nobly. Did it hurt much?

CORRE

A lot. It still does. (*He continues to stare.*) But it's worth it. What shall I do? Now I've started looking I can't stop.

MARY

Try a cigarette. The blaze of the match may distract your attention.

(*She offers him one from a box on the table.*)

CORRE

Thanks. I prefer my own. (*He takes one from his case.*) Will you light it for me?

(*She lights one for herself and then his, and they sit on the sofa before the fireplace.*)

MARY

Seize the fleeting moment. This is the only happy one I expect to enjoy this evening.

CORRE

That's rather a queer statement in view of the alliance your mother intimated to me a few minutes ago.

MARY (*looks at him quickly*)

Already? You mean she spoke as if I were going to announce my engagement to Mr. Staunton?

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE

You do know of it then? I had almost hoped— (*Rising.*) Well, I think in view of the circumstances, you should be able to pass a few happy moments with him.

MARY

Sit down. (*He sits.*) He's mother's choice, not mine, and she's a long way from being his adoring mother-in-law.

CORRE

Lord knows, he has a lot to offer any girl.

MARY

Yes, I know that. But aside from his wealth and position, they say he is the best student in feminine psychology in town. And I couldn't expect him to give up his studies after marriage and concentrate his energies on one specimen of the sex, could I?

CORRE

I'm not pleading any man's cause with you, Miss Sedgewick. I do know of one man who would like to devote all the lives he could collect studying the psychology of one woman.

MARY

That would necessitate spending long, quiet evenings at home with that one woman, wouldn't it?

CORRE

It would. Tell me, does the very thought of long, quiet evenings at home with just one admiring male make you yawn with boredom?

MARY

If you only knew. (*She reaches back of her and brings over the copy of Society Notes, left lying on the table.*) Here's the sort of thing that is killing me by inches. (*Reading.*) "Mr. and Mrs. Sedgewick receive their guests in a veritable fairyland bower of pink roses. Mr. Sedgewick, as always handsome, dignified, aristocratic, was his

usual charming self, showing the influence of the society of foreign capitals grafted on our fine old American stock." (*She looks at him quizzically.*) That enchanting description is supposed to be father—my father.

CORRE

That's one very good point in his favor, Miss Sedgewick, the fact that he is your father.

MARY

Yes, he has always considered that the one redeeming feature in an otherwise ill-spent life. Do you want to hear another gem?

CORRE

I love the sound of your voice.

MARY (*hurriedly*)

Here's one sentence, all lies, two hundred words without a break. (*Reading with affected eloquence.*) "The effect of the congenial and beautiful home life and loving and exquisite care which have been the keynote of the débutante's rearing, her aunt on her mother's side having married the Earl of Conant, it being a matter of poignant regret that the Countess cannot be here for her niece's début, affairs of state demanding her presence elsewhere, and many of her kinsfolk on her father's side being descended from that fine old aristocracy of the southern states, masters of lordly plantations, where hospitality was a high art; her maternal progenitors having been captains of finance—shone in her beatific young face as she greeted her hosts of admiring friends and guests." (*She tosses the paper back on the table with a gesture of despair.*) You see, quite apart from a lack of syntax in these descriptions, there isn't a word of truth in them either. My aunt, the countess, is occupied at present getting a divorce from a perfect rotter of a husband. And the most important of my maternal progenitors— (*She looks at him searchingly, and he allows himself a broad grin.*) You've heard rumors, no doubt?

CORRE

I have heard that before he was a captain of finance he served a term as a captive of finance.

MARY

Can't you see what a laughingstock this makes me feel? When I know that others know and are revelling in it, especially those that aren't asked here to-night? When I know—Oh, Lord! (*She quotes despairingly.*) "Mr. Sedgewick, his charming self—congenial home life—beatific young face—" (*She pushes her face in front of his, inviting scrutiny.*) Look. Can you observe a happy shine on this beatific young countenance?

CORRE

Don't ask me to inspect that countenance again to-night. I did it once at my own risk. Next time I do it, it will be at yours.

MARY (*insistent*)

Look at me, please. (*She makes a grimace like a child crying.*) My beatific young face.

CORRE (*turns and looks deep into her eyes. Her face grows sweet and serious. He lays his hands on her shoulders; she does not draw away.*)

I don't have to look at your face, Mary Sedgewick. I've had it before me waking and sleeping for more than a year. I've loved the innocence of it, the wistfulness of it, and the fine sincerity that glows in your dark eyes. And I've damned my helplessness to snatch you away from these fool influences that were trying to mold you into a chuckleheaded little flapper. (*He releases her shoulders and catches hold of her hands.*) Mary, my dear, my dear, chuck these things you hate and come away with me.

MARY

You mean—

CORRE

Marry me now. We'll have our youth together.

MARY

Are you acting from a sense of duty, sort of rescue work affair—or—

CORRE

Rescue work? Good Lord, when I spend my waking hours thinking new ways of telling you you're the most wonderful thing on God's green earth. You've put my work on the blink, my practice on the blink, and me on the blink. Now, who needs rescue, I'd like to know?

MARY

Both of us, perhaps. We'll draw up a fifty-fifty rescue scheme for you and me.

CORRE

We needn't draw it up. They'll do it for us at the City Hall. They call it a marriage license.

MARY

Oh!

CORRE

If I go shopping for one to-morrow, will you come with me to help me select a nice one?

MARY

I'm busy to-morrow. Won't next week do?

CORRE

Mary, Mary, don't make it too long, dear. I won't be really living until I've got you fast; until I see you sitting across my hearth from me.

MARY (*dreamily*)

Across your hearth from you. Why, how jolly that sounds.

CORRE

Doesn't it? And Mary—

MARY

Yes?

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE

I had such a cute, snappy way of proposing to you, but you messed it all up.

MARY

I did?

CORRE

Yes, you excited me so I forgot my lines. Shall I tell you the other one now?

MARY

Oh, do. And I can accept the one I like best.

CORRE

Here goes. I could die a happy man—if—if I could kiss you—once.

MARY

I'd hate to see you die—but—

(She does not lean away from him. He seizes her in his arms and kisses her. She releases herself.)

CORRE

That wasn't a real one. I went slow at first.

MARY

It seemed rather rapid to me. Have you—have you another variety of those, too?

CORRE

Several. Here's another. *(He catches her and kisses her.)* That one was on second speed. And here goes one on high.

(He takes MARY in his arms again, and they are interrupted in a very thorough embrace by STAUNTON, who enters from the right, and stands looking at them a moment before he speaks.)

STAUNTON

I knew I was right. *(They spring to their feet. CORRE glares at STAUNTON.)* You said there was no other man.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MARY

There wasn't—then.

CORRE (*coldly emphatic*)

There most decidedly is now.

STAUNTON

Didn't take you very long to learn a woman's tricks, did it, Miss Sedgewick? Prevaricating so prettily about loving an ideal when all the time it was this man's arms and his kisses you were thinking about. (*Roughly.*) How long has this been going on?

CORRE (*walks up to STAUNTON and speaks very gently*)

I don't like your tone. Please change it.

STAUNTON

You are assuming a good deal of authority in a house where you are not even a guest.

CORRE

I won't tell you again I don't like your insolence. You say another word I don't like and I'll take you out in the rear and spoil your appearance as a guest for some time to come.

STAUNTON (*disgustedly*)

Cave-man stuff! (CORRE *starts towards him. He turns nervously to MARY.*) Hold your friend off; I don't want my hair mussed. By the way, I think your mother will have a word or two to say in this argument.

MARY (*airily*)

Let mother divorce father and marry you herself. It would give her great pleasure, coming and going.

(*A loud tuning of instruments is heard from the sun room. MRS. SEDGEWICK enters excitedly.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Mary, Mary, come this instant. The first guests are arriving, and we must form our receiving line.

SOCIETY NOTES

MARY

Don't get excited, mother. You've always said the first guests are sure to be poor relations and people who don't count, so we'll have plenty of time to finish this argument we're having.

STAUNTON (*sourly*)

Your daughter has an important announcement to make to you first, Mrs. Sedgewick.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*blissful*)

Oh, Mr. Staunton.

STAUNTON

She wants to tell you she's engaged to be married.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*hurries over to STAUNTON and buries her head on his shoulder*)

What happiness, what joy. You are the only man in the world my mother's heart can gladly give her to—(*At a loss for words.*) How ravishing, how simply and divinely ravishing! Reginald, my dear, dear son.

STAUNTON

I hate to disillusion you, Mrs. Sedgewick, but you are embracing the wrong son. (MRS. SEDGEWICK *straightens up, suddenly aware of strained relations. She looks from one to the other.*) I regret to say I am not the ravishing one. Dr. Corre is the—er—lucky man.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre, I am amazed at your effrontery.

MARY (*in a tone of appeal*)

Mother, please!

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*the old Ben Higgins strain crashing through the Sedgewick veneer as she yields to her rage and disappointment*)

Mary, you ungrateful, impertinent thing, be still or leave the room. I know what I am doing. After all I have done for you—this!

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MARY

I believe I'll stay. I'm a bit interested in the outcome.

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*the Sedgewick veneer totally submerged*)

Then hold your tongue. (*She turns to CORRE.*) To sneak into the sanctity of our home and try to beguile this child into a marriage which can mean nothing but misery and sacrifice; made-over clothes, hashed-over food, loss of servants, and loss of friends—am I right?

CORRE (*politely interested*)

I'm sure I don't know. I have never met people like that intimately. Very interesting though, no doubt.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

To take this girl away from a position of prominence and luxury to share the life of a poor, unknown professional man, to run his office, do his work— What have I done to deserve all this?

CORRE

Mrs. Sedgewick, aren't you drawing a good bit on your imagination? I'd like to correct some of your impressions, if I may. I am not a poor, unknown professional man, proof enough that I attend your husband. And my people have been doctors and men of science as far back as we can trace them. And I rather think I am going to make a big thing of my career. It won't be my fault if I don't. You are mistaken if you think I am a poor weakling seeking a leg up by marrying into a rich family. (*Ruefully.*) As it is, it will take me years to live this down among the doctors.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

I have made my plans. I will not have them interfered with. Dr. Corre, you had better go at once.

MARY

If he goes, I go with him. Now! To-night! Then where are your plans?

SOCIETY NOTES

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*loses her head*)

You are a thoroughly ungrateful, disobedient, insolent girl and not to be trusted for an instant. I will not have you dictate to me; I will lock you in your room first.

MARY

Quite aside from the foolishness of that threat, you would have to make some very curious explanations to your guests. Hush, listen! (*The strumming of instruments and broken chords float in with the sound of voices. MARY is very grave.*) Quick, mother! What is it to be? Am I to live my own life in my own way, or shall I refuse to appear to-night?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*waking up to her powerlessness*)

Mary, Mary, what has gotten into you?

MARY (*suddenly begins to dance about the room*)

Oh, I'm happy, I'm happy, happy, happy; I'm happy for the first time in my life. I'm so happy it hurts. I want to cry and laugh and sing and shout. I love every one. Oh, start the music, some one, I have to dance. (*Her father totters in and she throws her arms about him, almost flinging him off his feet.*) Oh, father, father, I'm so happy. I'm engaged to be married.

SEDGEWICK (*grouchy*)

The devil you are. To whom?

CORRE (*coming forward*)

To me, Mr. Sedgewick.

SEDGEWICK (*grinning broadly, to the surprise of all and the consternation of his wife*)

By Jove, that's the best news I've heard in years. Fine! Fine! Get some strong, new blood in the family. Correct your mother's mistake in marrying me, my dear. (*He kisses her.*)

STAUNTON (*goes toward the door, right*)

This is the door, I believe? (*They all look at him questioningly.*) Where the butler dispenses appetizers for the

evening's bliss? My congratulations! You take the bliss, I'll take the appetizers.
(*He goes off, right.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*weakly*)

I'm sure I don't see—

(*MISS FOUNTAIN'S voice is heard off stage. MRS. SEDGEWICK straightens, and takes command again.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Hush! Not a word! I hear Miss Fountain. (*She makes a supreme effort and recaptures her company manners.*)
Percival, Mary, we must form in line.

SEDGEWICK

I say, Corre, you want to stand in well with the old man. Let me have one of those appetizers to bliss. Not much in 'em, just a bit of vermouth and a bit of gin and a bit of old bourbon, and a dash of bitters—ah, if you only knew how the thought of one affects me.

CORRE

Make it a half a one, sir.

SEDGEWICK

A parent's blessing on your young head.
(*He goes out, right.*)

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*crosses quickly to where MARY and CORRE stand at the door, left*)

I believe you said er—your ancestors—such an interesting detail, you know—they have been doctors for generations, you said?

CORRE

Back to the Revolution, and not a chiropodist or a veterinary in the lot.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Dr. Corre—in time—I hope you will forget—forgive—I love my daughter—I want her to be happy.

SOCIETY NOTES

CORRE (*with an ingratiating smile*)

Mrs. Sedgewick, I hope you will forgive—I love your daughter—I'll make her happy.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

My childr—

(MISS FOUNTAIN *sails in from the sun room.*)

MARY (*pulling CORRE through the door*)

Oh, glory, here comes Society Notes. Run!

(MARY and CORRE *go off, left.* MISS FOUNTAIN *advances to the center.* MRS. SEDGEWICK *has made a quick recovery.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

And everything so unbelievably wonderful. And, dear Mr. Sedgewick—I saw him just now—so full of spirits. And Mr. Staunton—so stunning, so aristo—

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*interrupts suavely and confidentially*)

Miss Fountain, it was on that subject I wanted a moment's talk with you. You know how it is when a girl has so many suitors—we had rather thought that Mary and Mr. Staunton—but I fear I was a bit premature this evening—

MISS FOUNTAIN

I see. Mary wishes to enjoy her girlish freedom a bit longer.

MRS. SEDGEWICK

Not exactly. Mary has always been so intellectually, so spiritually inclined, that she has placed her affections where she can develop the higher side of her nature. In the meantime I can tell you that Dr. Corre—

MISS FOUNTAIN (*overcome to the point of indiscretion for the only time in her life*)

Dr. Corre?

MRS. SEDGEWICK (*blandly and imperturbably*)

That Dr. Corre is a leader in the medical profession, his ancestors having been distinguished doctors as far back as

the *Mayflower*. We are very well pleased. I shall be able to give you information for a full column for next Sunday's Society Notes.

MISS FOUNTAIN (*who has been swallowing her surprise during MRS. SEDGEWICK'S speech, and who has now recovered her usual poise*)

Splendid, glorious, ravishing, simply ravishing!

(*Full and loud the dance music is heard through the sun room. They rise. MISS FOUNTAIN stands, her right arm flung aloft, her face and pose alight with the fervor and glorious expectancy of the Angel in the Annunciation.*)

MISS FOUNTAIN

Hush! THE BALL of the season is beginning.

CURTAIN

SOCIAL BALANCE

A COMEDY OF BAD MANNERS

by SAMUEL FAYDER

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SOCIAL BALANCE

"Social Balance" is a satirical comedy that can be presented, if necessary, in the simplest of settings. Furniture of any description may be used, as it is covered with cretonnes. If the usual box set is not available, you may resort to screens or draperies without appreciably lessening the effectiveness of the play. Your property man also has an easy time of it—there are just a few articles that can be found in any home.

Of the four characters, that of LENA is perhaps the best. But the comedy is really a "company play," as it is called in the professional theater. That is, none of the parts stands out prominently above the others. In your direction, be sure that the play doesn't drag. With the entrance of BEN KINGSTON strike a lively tempo and see that your actors hold it until the final curtain.

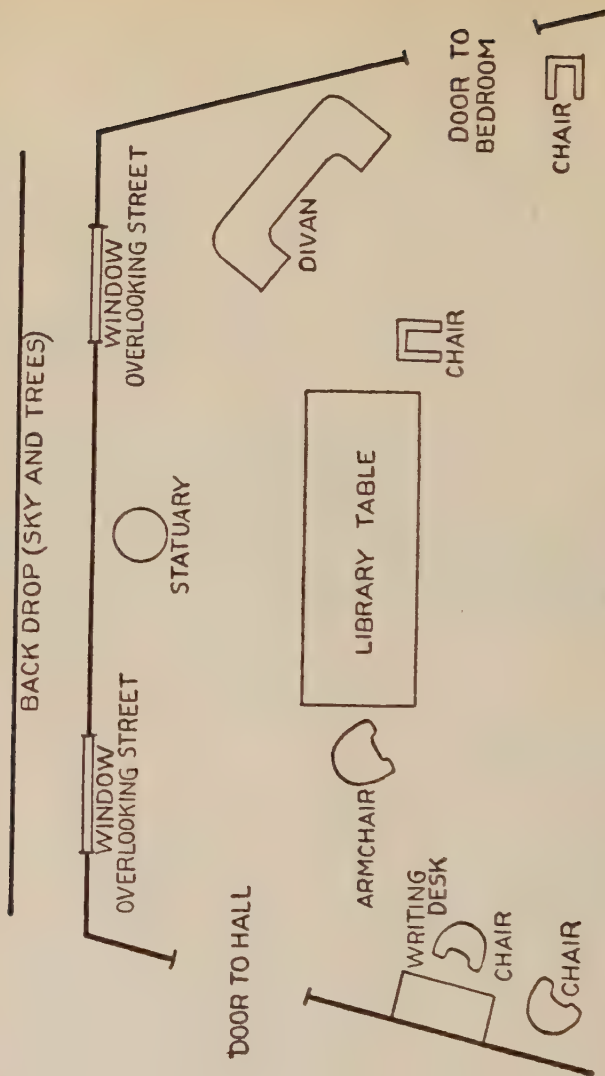
PROPERTY LIST

FOR MARJORIE

- Traveling bag
- Parasol

FOR WALKER

- Packet of letters
- Telegram
- Writing materials



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "SOCIAL BALANCE"

SOCIAL BALANCE

CHARACTERS

WILLOUGHBY WALKER

MARJORIE, *his wife*

LENA KINGSTON

BEN, *her husband*

THE PLACE: *A dainty sitting room in a city mansion with a door to the hall, another to a bedroom, and a wide window to the street. The furniture is covered. In the beginning the doors and the shutters of the window are closed, the room completely dark.*

THE TIME: *An evening in late summer.*

From the brightly lighted hall comes WILLOUGHBY WALKER, carrying a lady's traveling bag and parasol. He switches on the lights and stands waiting for further instructions with forced patience. WALKER is about forty, well developed, with the quiet assurance of the prosperous and pride of the socially elect, but mediocre and conventional. MRS. WALKER—MARJORIE—follows. She is about thirty-five, frail and pretty, with a charming air of refinement and whimsical wistfulness, marred only by a subdued restlessness. She enters briskly and begins to take off her hat and summer mantle. WALKER watches her with silent disapproval masked by unconcern. MARJORIE avoids his eyes but keeps the corners of her own on him. She grimaces at the cheerlessness and disorder of the room. WALKER is gratified. With an abrupt smile and playfully elaborate gesture she requests him to take her things to the bedroom. He goes to obey.

WALKER

The door is locked.

MARJORIE

It can't be. I meant to air the room.
(*She tries it.*)

WALKER

Where's the key?

MARJORIE

Now what *did* I do with the key? (*She thinks.* WALKER puts down her belongings, indifferent.) That's strange.

WALKER

When you take it into your head to come to a closed-down house, with not even a caretaker on the premises—!

MARJORIE

I'm positive I left the door wide open, and the key in the lock—almost positive. (*Startled by a sound within, she whispers.*) Some one I believe—

(WALKER silences her, listens against the door, then nods. *She tries to get him out of the room but he is determined to stay. He reassures her, telling her to go to the hall from where she can more readily call for assistance. The idea does not please her. Their whispered colloquy is cut short by the grating of the lock. MARJORIE hurriedly hides behind a high-backed chair in a corner, while WALKER arms himself with the parasol and awaits the intruder. From the door soon enters a well proportioned, ill dressed woman of thirty-two, energetic and cheerful, shrewd but uncultured. She seems perfectly confident of her right to be on the premises.*)

LENA (*perceiving WALKER, sharply but good-naturedly*)

What are ye doin' here?

WALKER (*taken aback*)

I?— Why what do you imagine I'm doing here?

LENA

In a shut-down house? I'd rather not say till I'm sure.

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER (*indignantly*)

I am Mr. Willoughby Walker!

LENA (*unconvinced*)

You are?

WALKER

Don't I look like him?

LENA

I look like some o' them society ladies in the Sunday papers.

WALKER

But I really am Willoughby Walker—even if I don't look like him.

LENA

Oh, I don't condemn no one by appearances. But ye got to prove ye're the gentleman, not a—

WALKER

Upon my word—! (*After a moment's perplexity.*) Oh! (*He draws out a batch of papers and hands some letters to her impressively one by one.*) Addressed to me at this very house. Addressed to my summer home. To my hotel here in the city where I stop part of the week. (*Challengingly.*) How did I get these letters if I'm not who I am?

LENA (*returning the letters unimpressed*)

Ye might have found 'em round the house; or picked Mr. Walker's pockets; or sent 'em to yerself.

WALKER (*stares amazed and helpless at LENA and the letters alternately*)

Great Christopher! How *am* I to prove I'm standing in my own house?

LENA

Well, if ye could call some one in to place ye, maybe—

WALKER

Will our caretaker, the housekeeper next door, do?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MARJORIE (*coming uncertainly from her hiding place*)
Pardon me. I can identify him.

WALKER (*relieved*)
Yes, fortunately Mrs. Walker is here.

LENA
Mrs. Walker? Before the end o' summer?

MARJORIE
Yes, I—I returned unexpectedly.

WALKER
Just arrived. To pay me and the city a little surprise visit.

LENA
In a shut-down house?

WALKER
Merely a notion of hers—to come straight here. Got an idea she'd like to stay in her own house.

MARJORIE
I can't bear hotels. They remind me of boarding houses and furnished rooms. I prefer my own house, prepared or unprepared.

WALKER
And just to convince her it's out of the question I brought her here.

MARJORIE (*turning abruptly from LENA's interested scrutiny*)
Will, where is that telegram I sent you?

WALKER
Good! Why didn't I think of it before? You women are wonderful sometimes. (*He finds the telegram and hands it like an ultimatum to LENA.*) I hope this telegram is sufficient proof.
(*He waits for her judgment, but not too hopefully.*)

LENA
Ah! That's what I call proof. Short and to the point.

Of course I suspected it was you even when ye was downstairs, but I had to make sure. I know ye'll excuse me doin' my duty.

WALKER (*severely*)

And now what are *you* doing here?

LENA (*with strained self-possession*)

Me? Why ain't I just after tellin' ye what I'm doin'? And ain't ye just after seein' me do it?

WALKER

Young woman, no quibbling. (*Looking her over with disdain.*) I guess I know your kind.

LENA (*resentfully*)

I beg yer pardon. I'm nothin' o' the kind. (*With a touch of pride.*) Even though my clothes ain't designed by yer wife's dressmaker.

MARJORIE (*ashamed of him*)

Will!

WALKER

I apologize if I'm mistaken. But I'm rarely mistaken.

LENA

Well, this is one o' the rarelys.

MARJORIE

It must be. Perhaps she can explain.

WALKER

She will have to explain. If not to me, to the police.

(BEN KINGSTON enters, casting a sullen look at his host and hostess, who retreat a step from possible danger. He is a young man of thirty-five, with the careworn expression of middle age; dispirited, defiantly indifferent, but quite inoffensive.)

LENA (*her practical, cheerful self again, introducing*)

Meet my husband. Mr. and Mrs. Walker. They proved it. (KINGSTON nods curtly, WALKER solemnly, MRS. WALKER graciously.)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

KINGSTON (*bluntly*)

Kingston's my name. Ben Kingston. And I ain't ashamed of it.

MARJORIE (*murmuring*)

A very sweet name indeed.

KINGSTON

Nor of anything I ever done or will do.

WALKER

Well, really— If you will merely inform us what you are doing here now—

KINGSTON

I'll tell ye anything ye care to know. And if ye want to hand us over to the police ye can go ahead and do it.

LENA (*sharply*)

You just let the police alone. This ain't their house, is it?

WALKER

We shall see about that later. We are waiting for an explanation.

LENA (*with persuasive confidence and good humor*)

It's all so very simple and yet ye'd never guess it. (MARJORIE becomes interested.) We've been takin' care o' yer house.

WALKER

And you expect me to believe that?

KINGSTON

Yes; we did take care o' the house, as long as we was here.

WALKER

Very well. Let us say you took care of the house—for an hour or so.

LENA (*laughing*)

An hour! We've been here a month.

KINGSTON

Exactly four weeks to-morrow.

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER

Impossible. Impossible!

LENA

It may be three times impossible but it's true.

WALKER

But our real caretaker—

LENA

Oh, her! She wouldn't notice if the house was carried off; or bother if she did.

MARJORIE

They ought to know how long they've been here.

WALKER

Well, an hour or a month, it amounts to what I said originally.

LENA

Not by a big figure. We never took as much as a speck o' dust from the house.

KINGSTON

Or thought o' takin' it.

LENA

Ye *will* miss a few little things but ye can find 'em in the kitchen of yer caretaker.

WALKER (*baffled to annoyance*)

Well, what on earth did you come for?

LENA

Just to stay. It was this way—

KINGSTON

No use beatin' round the bush. That ain't my way. I was broke. About as broke as they make 'em these rotten times.

WALKER (*proudly*)

A man isn't broke when he is willing to work.

KINGSTON (*his tender spot irritated*)

Willin' to work! I guess ye're willin' a' right knowin'

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

what's awaitin' ye when ye bring home nothin' but a paper turned up at the want ads.

LENA (*interjecting reproachfully*)

Ben!

KINGSTON

But what's the good o' bein' willin' when no work's to be had. Oh, I can't blame you or my missus much; but hearin' lectures about not bein' willin' to work from some o' those capitalists that ain't willin' to give ye a job—!

WALKER

I suppose you have no trade.

KINGSTON (*with pride*)

Who, me? I've got too many. Worked at ever'thing from autos to baby carriages. Anything that can be done with tools and horse sense. My last job was porter.

WALKER

Oh, well, it makes no difference.

LENA

None at all—to you.

(*She examines her hands wistfully.*)

KINGSTON

It made this difference to me. I found everything I own—wife, furniture and children—dumped on the sidewalk.

MARJORIE

Oh, landlords can't be as heartless as all that.

LENA

I don't know about landlords, but their agents ain't troubled by too much heart.

WALKER (*dismissing the impertinent topic, to KINGSTON*)

Well?

KINGSTON

Well, that night there was nothin' for us to do but camp out in the park. We was sittin' on that bench outside—

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER

Ah! You noticed this house closed down, and no lights to indicate a caretaker on the premises, and you decided to take possession?

KINGSTON

It was standin' there useless, and we sittin' opposite without a roof over our heads—or the hope o' one for weeks.

LENA

And the kids asleep and shiverin' on our hands. (*Appealing to MARJORIE.*) What else could we do?

MARJORIE

Really, Will, what else could they do?

WALKER

They could have chosen another's house.

LENA

Whose house should we choose if not— Anyway, ye see why we're here.

WALKER

I've heard, but— (*He shakes his head dubiously.*) You mentioned children. I don't hear any.

LENA (*pointing to the bedroom*)

They're all asleep.

(*WALKER starts thither but stops cautiously. MRS. WALKER, much interested, goes into the bedroom and immediately returns, beaming and nodding affirmatively to her husband.*)

MARJORIE

Yes! Three little darling dears.

LENA

They're dear enough when ye can't afford 'em.

MARJORIE (*impulsively*)

Oh, no! They're so cute resting in their little dream world of dolls and dogs and things.

LENA

The only toys they do have.

WALKER

Returning to important matters—I need hardly ask which of you planned this invasion. (*He regards MRS. KINGSTON sharply. She acknowledges the compliment by a smile.*) But how did you get in?

KINGSTON

Just vaultin' over the back fence and pryin' open a window with a pocket knife. I told ye I was handy with tools.

WALKER

In other words you broke into the house.

LENA

We had no keys to get in with.

WALKER (*portentously*)

Well, the next house you go to won't require any keys or breaking into.

(*An ominous pause. MARJORIE is distressed. KINGSTON tosses his head recklessly. LENA is ironically calm.*)

LENA

Ye really mean to hand us over to the police?

WALKER

I wouldn't be a law-abiding citizen if I didn't.

LENA

Well, if ye want to do this accordin' to law, all right. But ye'll have to appear in court against us several times, both o' ye. And ye'll have to prove—which ye couldn't—that we took somethin' or left the house worse than we found it. And then ye'll have to appear again when I sue ye for a month's wages takin' care of yer house.

(*WALKER gapes at the prospect.*)

MARJORIE

No, Will. I won't consent to their arrest. They did take care of the house. And they gave us a thrilling surprise.

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER (*with polite sarcasm*)

That's right. Let them off. Make *me* the lawbreaker.

MARJORIE

We owe them something.

WALKER

Perhaps reward them, too?

MARJORIE

It wouldn't be unlawful.

WALKER (*turns from her impatiently to the KINGSTONS*)

Clear out before I change my mind.

(*With a grimace at the closed window he starts mopping his brow.*)

KINGSTON (*smiling*)

I'll get our things together.

(*He exits to the bedroom.*)

LENA (*appealingly*)

I suppose we'll find a bench somewhere in the park.

(*She notices the imploring look MARJORIE gives WALKER and decides to leave them together. She is occasionally seen in the bedroom doorway, listening guardedly to the following, at first anxiously, then thoughtfully, then with sympathetic, ironic amusement.*)

MARJORIE

Will, dear, we can't turn them out like this without notice.

WALKER

I'll give them something for a supper and a night's lodging.

MARJORIE

But the kiddies. It would be a sin to wake them.

WALKER

I didn't put them asleep.

MARJORIE (*impulsively*)

We must invite them all to spend the night here, Will.

WALKER

Impossible. We are going to the hotel. We must leave the house securely locked.

MARJORIE

Now we surely needn't go. They would be kind enough to help us here.

WALKER

What on earth, Marjorie, is the use of all this bother? Before you can begin to make yourself comfortable you'll be returning to the cottage.

MARJORIE (*quietly*)

I am not returning to the cottage.

WALKER (*surprised and displeased*)

You mean you are in the city for good?

MARJORIE (*with uneasy cheerfulness*)

Not for good. Only till winter.

WALKER (*after a pause*)

Surely you can't seriously intend to stay in the city the rest of the summer.

MARJORIE

I surely can intend to. In fact I do intend to.

(*She opens the window.*)

WALKER (*argumentatively*)

Now see here, Marjorie— Don't you realize the weather is hot as blazes and will be hot another month? And that it isn't good for you to stay? You don't like it much even in winter. You always wish it gets warmer so you can go to the cottage.

MARJORIE

But there I always wish it got cooler so I can come here.

WALKER

Then why can't you stay out the season there as planned, as proper, as best? They might think I wanted to economize or went bankrupt.

SOCIAL BALANCE

MARJORIE (*giving up her attempt to open the shutters*)

Oh, why can't men be more reasonable. Do you imagine I *like* to stay here summers?

WALKER

Then in the name of reason why did you bolt from a home where you are comfortable and happy to one where you can be neither?

MARJORIE

But I wasn't comfortable. I wasn't happy.

WALKER

You ought to be—a cottage like that—

MARJORIE

I grew so frightfully lonely there I simply couldn't stay a day longer.

WALKER

I joined you every week-end.

MARJORIE

But the rest of the week! I felt as if I had been doomed to live for ages in an air-tight little world all by myself.

WALKER

But how could you feel that way, surrounded by such a sociable, select circle?

MARJORIE

Oh, they're all nice people in their way. You can always depend on them not to appear in evening clothes for lunch—

WALKER

Then what objection—?

MARJORIE

None—except that they bored me.

WALKER (*rebuking her irreverence*)

Marjorie!

MARJORIE

They only reminded me how close and lonesome my little world really was.

WALKER

Well, if they weren't select enough for you, you should have put some of those farmers and shopkeepers (*tossing his head slightly toward the bedroom*) and this sort on your visiting list.

MARJORIE

I couldn't properly approach them without an introduction from some one they respect. They would stare at me with such reproach or contempt—

WALKER

You mean envy.

MARJORIE

—as if it were my fault that I've the means to be better gowned and nourished than they.

WALKER

Nonsense. You imagine all that.

MARJORIE

Is it more pleasant to imagine it? It's like fearing in your heart there is cause for their scorn.

WALKER

To me it's like indigestion.

MARJORIE

If not for the country kiddies I'd meet—! But this morning I didn't meet one kiddie I expected. Then the clouds all gathered over me till I could see only that I must flee the storm. And here I am—in another storm.

WALKER (*earnestly*)

You are simply determined to be unhappy.

MARJORIE

Yes, I refuse to be happy unless I am unhappy.

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER

You have everything money and social position can command. No family cares—unless I am a care to you. Anything I possibly can, I do to make you content.

MARJORIE

I don't blame you.

WALKER

But you shut your eyes to it all and keep groping for—whatever you are groping for.

MARJORIE

I don't really know myself.

WALKER

Naturally; for you don't really want anything. (*Irritated because she turns away unsatisfied.*) There! I'm giving you practical advice and you won't even listen.

MARJORIE

I don't want practical advice. It never did me any good. I do expect a little sympathy.

WALKER

I've given you that all along and much good it has done you! Oh, have your choice. But in the future blame no one but yourself.

MARJORIE (*conciliatory*)

Well, advise me. I promise to—listen.

WALKER

I don't advise any more. I merely state my personal opinion. That you should give up all those queer notions of clouds and storms and stuffy little worlds.

MARJORIE

That would be practical. But how?

WALKER

The first thing is to get out of here—as soon as we are rid of these intruders. Come to my hotel. I guarantee you'll find nothing stuffy there. And to-morrow you must re-

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

turn to the fresh air, pleasant company, and diversions of the cottage. Follow my advice and we'll both be happier.

MARJORIE

If it will make you happier I'll go back in a few days—when the city begins to bore me.

WALKER

No objection to a few days in the city.

MARJORIE

Here in the house. These people looking after us.

WALKER

No, no! I can't allow it. We know nothing about them. And we can't stay here alone.

MARJORIE

We won't stay alone. They will stay, too.

WALKER (*exasperated*)

Very well! But don't expect me to stay with you. I'll remain where I'm comfortable.

(*He turns away in a huff.*)

MARJORIE (*winningly*)

Oh, he is not angry? He can't be. He'll stand by his unhappy, lonesome little wife—even if she is unreasonable and foolish and headstrong. Of course. He won't fail her when she needs him most. Will he? (*He tosses his head impatiently.*) Well, then, let him!

(*She turns her back on him proudly.*)

WALKER

My dear Marjorie, can't you see I'm trying to protect you?

MARJORIE

Yes, by deserting me.

LENA (*entering, followed by KINGSTON*)

Excuse me. I couldn't help hearin' ye. We'd be glad to stay here and make ye cozy till ye go back to the country, but we don't want ye to quarrel on our account. If we

SOCIAL BALANCE

can't make ye both happier with us here we'd sooner leave right now.

MARJORIE

Ah, don't mind him. I don't.

LENA

Oh, you're his wife.

(WALKER listens with an air of indifference. He catches himself admiring MRS. KINGSTON'S personality.)

LENA (after a pause, businesslike)

Well! Had yer supper?

MARJORIE

Yes, thank you. Have you?

LENA

Never mind us now. And about sleepin'—I'll fix up yer bedroom. Ye won't feel comfortable anywheres else.

MARJORIE

That would wake the kiddies though.

LENA

They're used to bein' lugged round asleep. And it won't harm 'em to wake awhile.

MARJORIE

If you really think so, take them to the nursery. I'll show you where.

LENA (going to the hall door)

I know the place. I've not been livin' here only an hour. (Her eyes meet WALKER'S. He ignores her elaborately. She stands watching him a moment with a pensive smile, then comes back. Practically.) Mr. Walker. (He looks rigidly into space. LENA, smiling, to MARJORIE.) Have ye seen Mr. Walker round here?

MARJORIE

He said he wouldn't stay with me here, so I presume he returned to his boarding house.

LENA

Too bad. I've got somethin' to say that should interest him.

WALKER (*squirming*)

If you two women stopped guying a helpless man perhaps he'd listen.

MARJORIE

Oh, here he is!

LENA (*earnestly*)

I want to talk to both o' ye. Sit down—please. (*She motions KINGSTON to join them. He listens during the following with silent detached interest. WALKER is inclined to disobey. MRS. WALKER pulls him down unceremoniously beside her. They wait expectantly till LENA rouses from reflection.*) I've been thinkin' things over and I'm not satisfied with our plan.

WALKER (*pleased*)

Ah!

LENA

It won't lead any of us very far.

MARJORIE (*regretfully*)

Now *you* are going to desert me.

LENA

That'll be up to you and Mr. Walker.

WALKER (*less pleased*)

Oh!

MARJORIE

But *we* are satisfied.

LENA

I've had plenty o' chances to learn things about ye and it has struck me, we four here are as funny a lot o' what's called intelligent creatures as ever got together. (*She cannot resist a short satiric laugh. The WALKERS eye the KINGSTONS and each other, perplexed.*)

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER

I see nothing funny. About two of us anyhow. Do you, dear?

MARJORIE (*quizzically*)

I *feel* something funny about us, but—

LENA (*smiles tolerantly at human density. Directly*)

Ye're not happy, both o' ye—are ye?

(MARJORIE *hesitates uncomfortably, then sighs.*)

WALKER (*freezing silence not enough now, challengingly*)

Are *you* both happy?

LENA

That's part o' the fun. We're in the same class there.

(MRS. WALKER *is mildly amused.*)

WALKER (*rebuking both*)

I've sufficient humor but I see nothing funny in all of us being unhappy—whether in the same class or not.

LENA

I guess it's mighty funny when each side has just what the other needs to be happy.

MARJORIE

That would be odd.

WALKER (*perplexed—and vexed*)

Pardon me. I didn't quite catch that.

LENA

I said we have just what you need and you have just what we need to be happy.

WALKER

That's ridiculous. What can you have that we lack? I can't see anything.

LENA (*eying him keenly*)

You can't even see what you alone lack.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

WALKER

I see what you're driving at—your whole "funny" situation. You need work and we need a caretaker.

LENA

If that's on yer mind let me tell ye I decline the offer with thanks.

WALKER

Then what in mischief *are* you driving at?

MARJORIE

Oh, do explain what each has that the other needs for happiness.

LENA

It's plain as day if ye look straight at things and call 'em by their real names.

WALKER (*coldly, choosing his words*)

Our vocabularies are sufficiently adequate for our purposes.

MARJORIE

We sha'n't object to frankness. No one can hear us.

LENA

Well, to begin with what Mr. Walker noticed but didn't quite see. We are a handy couple goin' idle, and you have no one that can really look after yer house.

WALKER

Exactly what I said.

LENA

I don't mean the caretakin' durin' the summer. I mean all year round.

WALKER

But—

LENA

I've seen the house pretty well. 'Tain't hard to tell a

SOCIAL BALANCE

hundred little things need repairin' and cleanin' and attendin' to. The basement floor's a horror.

MARJORIE (*surprised*)

Is it? I seldom go down there.

WALKER

But that's only a matter of discomfort.

LENA

And the housekeepin'. Such waste and fake! I saw some grocery and butcher bills lyin' round. Two bills paid twice. And the food they claim delivered—why a regular hotel couldn't use so much. And the prices! Oh, my God! (MR. AND MRS. WALKER *exchange stares of astonishment.*) If a dealer or housekeeper ever tried such tricks on me—!

WALKER

But—

LENA

Ye can look at everything yerself. It'll do ye good.

WALKER

But that's only a matter of a little money.

LENA

There again. You have more money than ye can keep track of, while we—

WALKER (*ironically*)

Aha! If we divided our money with you we'd be happy.

LENA

Ye wouldn't be any less happy and we—

WALKER

Now I see!

LENA

Yes—but the wrong thing.

MARJORIE

She was merely pointing out a truth.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

WALKER

And I was pointing out the moral of the truth.

MARJORIE (*to LENA*)

Please continue.

LENA

Then we've got no home at all and you've got more homes than ye can be comfortable in. (MARJORIE *nods agreement. To WALKER.*) And my moral ain't to turn one o' yer houses over to us. (*To MARJORIE again.*) And then we who can't afford it have three children, and you who can haven't any.

MARJORIE

Oh, I adore children. Don't you?

LENA

Of course I adore 'em. Makes me feel only worse when I can't give 'em all I'd like to. Same as it makes you feel worse when ye think of all ye *could* 'a' done for 'em.

MARJORIE (*wistfully*)

Ye-es.

LENA

I guess you two know what I mean.

WALKER

Possibly. But why drag forth all these unpleasant details?

MARJORIE

Don't be ungrateful, Will. They do reveal a rather grotesque situation—both sides unhappy for precisely opposite reasons.

WALKER

But what good does it do? We haven't been consulted about our destinies. We can't alter them.

LENA

Can't we?

SOCIAL BALANCE

WALKER AND MARJORIE (*together, the former somewhat impatiently, the latter hopefully*)
How?

LENA

Ye grant each of us has what the other needs to be happy. We can all be happy then by gettin' together and sort of evenin' things up. A give and take arrangement to benefit both sides.

MARJORIE

Mutual coöperation?

WALKER

What new nonsense is this?

MARJORIE

I'm sure it isn't nonsense. I feel there is something in it. How do you mean?

LENA

Simple enough. We can live here with ye all along and—

WALKER

So that's your purpose. To live here with us definitely.

LENA

What's there to frighten ye? Are ye afraid ye might be happy? (*Ignoring him and addressing his wife.*) Me and my husband can relieve ye o' the trouble and worry lookin' after the house. He can be a general useful—do the repairs, drive yer car and bow to yer guests at the door. While I can attend to yer cleanin' and cookin' and buyin' and firin' lazy or unfaithful help.

WALKER

You can begin by firing yourself.

LENA (*good-humoredly*)

I'm not on the job yet. But when I am ye'll begin to know the comfort of a well run home. (*Anticipating an objection from WALKER.*) And don't worry about the salary. (*He makes a deprecating gesture.*) Ye can pay us out o'

the sum I promise to save ye by keepin' a sharp eye on all wastes and frauds and idlin'. And ye'll have enough left to buy cigars with.

MARJORIE

That would be splendid! Everything in perfect order and no personal responsibility for every trifling, ugly detail!

WALKER

That's a small matter. We can find many a good house-keeper.

LENA

And how many of 'em can also be a sister to Mrs. Walker? —tendin' to her, and chattin' about what interests her, givin' her common-sense advice, and always keepin' her bright and cheerful.

MARJORIE (*overjoyed*)

Oh! What I'm longing for!

LENA

And don't think I'm willin' to do it because I'm paid. I've taken a fancy to Mrs. Walker.

WALKER (*sarcastically*)

I'm sure Mrs. Walker is flattered by your condescension.

LENA (*turning to her sincerely*)

Indeed, I took a deep fancy to ye soon as I saw ye. (MARJORIE *seizes her hand in thankfulness and friendship.*) And it'll mean so much to me to feel in touch with an upper world which we poor people can only dream of.

MARJORIE

And it would mean so much to me to feel in contact with that big, struggling human world of which I have never been a part but always yearned to be.

(*The two women hold hands and look into each other's eyes with comprehension and sympathy.*)

WALKER (*forgotten, is embarrassed and exasperated*)

But hang it all! You're forgetting both of you what it

means to me. I'm a practical man. If I hire a new housekeeper I don't propose to get a butler tacked on. And even if I hired both I certainly wouldn't have three children, and perhaps a dozen cousins thrown in.

LENA

It's the kids ye won't stand for, is it? Why, without 'em what's the whole scheme worth? Can't ye see what ye need most is kids playin' and laughin' round the house? They'd soon make ye forget to be fidgety and cross and dissatisfied.

WALKER

Our own perhaps.

LENA

Treat 'em right and they'll be the next best thing to yer own.

MARJORIE

I'll just *make* them love me. And I'll ask them to call me auntie dear and you uncle dear. Oh, won't it be glorious!

WALKER (*obstinately*)

No, it won't. I'll not allow such a preposterous arrangement.

LENA

Hearin' ye they'd think you stand to lose everything and we to win.

MARJORIE (*entreatingly*)

You wish to be happy and make me happy, don't you?

LENA

And when the chance is thrust in his hand he refuses to grip it.

WALKER

But, good Lord, women! Such things aren't done nowadays.

LENA

If they ain't, they ought to be.

WALKER

It would be worse than breaking the law. It would be breaking our social system.

LENA

And worse still, makin' people happy.

WALKER

No. I'm too practical a man to start such radicalism. And if either of you persists, I'll have to ask the police to do their duty.

MARJORIE

You don't mean that, Will?

WALKER

I positively do. Unless they remove themselves at once—all of them.

LENA (*losing patience*)

Then ye're a born stubborn, blind fool—that's the plain truth. And I'll have nothin' more to do with ye. We won't be much unhappier than you. At least we'll know 'tain't our fault. That's more'n you'll be able to tell yerself—or Mrs. Walker.

WALKER

We shall settle that between ourselves. When do you leave?

KINGSTON (*openly cynical*)

Right now.

LENA

As soon as ye've looked through our bundles for things belongin' to you.

WALKER

I'll take your word for it.

LENA

I take no chances with a practical man like you. Ye've got to examine everything before we tie up. We don't leave before ye do. (WALKER, *nettled*, goes toward the

SOCIAL BALANCE

bedroom.) We don't intend to carry off anything o' yours, except yer happiness, which ye're set on. (*He glances guiltily at MRS. WALKER, who is sobbing, and disappears undecidedly. LENA goes to comfort MRS. WALKER.*) There, there, dearie! Ye must forget all about us.

MARJORIE

I couldn't if I tried.

LENA

Ye will forget—without tryin'— and that very soon. Ye'll realize all these plans couldn't come true. They're too good for us.

MARJORIE

I sha'n't know what to do with myself now.

LENA

I'd advise ye to go straight with Mr. Walker to his hotel, and back to yer country home to-morrow. And before ye know ye'll be convinced all this was only a dream o' what ain't on earth and can't be.

MARJORIE

And you? What will you do?

LENA

Oh, we'll get along somehow. Don't ye worry about us.

MARJORIE (*opening her purse*)

You'll need a little—

LENA

No, no. I couldn't take anything o' his.

MARJORIE

Only a month's wages for taking care of the house.

LENA

Not a cent. Even if ye called it a loan.

WALKER (*reënters, looking back with regret and gently closing the door.*) Everything is all right. (MARJORIE

gives him a cold stare, LENA a sarcastic side glance.) I took a look—

LENA

I want ye to take a look at the whole house.

WALKER

It's not necessary. (*Smiling.*) Besides, I wouldn't know if anything were missing.

LENA

Ye're satisfied we turn everything over safe and sound?

WALKER

Quite.

LENA

Then we leave soon as ye give us a written receipt.

(*WALKER gapes in surprise and admiration, takes writing materials and proceeds to write—with occasional complimentary glances at MRS. KINGSTON.*)

LENA (*forestalling a question*)

Ben Kingston's the name. Mine's Lena.

WALKER

I took a look at your little family. A fine lot of youngsters. That oldest boy particularly. What couldn't I do with a boy like that of my own!

LENA

I would have let ye bring him up just like he was yer own. But ye're too practical a man.

WALKER

Marjorie—you have taken such an interest in these people, you might sign this, too. (*She turns away resentfully. He laughs quite satisfied with himself.*) Well, if you will all listen I'll read it. (*Reading.*) "This is to certify that Mr. Benjamin Kingston and family are duly authorized to share indefinitely the home of Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby Walker—

(*The KINGSTONS take the news calmly.*)

SOCIAL BALANCE

MARJORIE (*flies over and hugs him with hysterical joy*)
Oh, you're a dear!

WALKER

For heavens' sake—leave me breathe enough to finish reading this. (*She hastens to embrace LENA. He reads on.*) —“to share the home”—yes—“and to receive an allowance agreeable to both parties, said allowance to be not less than the standard salaries of a housekeeper and a butler—Signed, Willoughby A. Walker.” I trust that will be satisfactory. Or have you something to suggest?

LENA

I might suggest ye're too late.

MARJORIE (*impulsively*)

Oh, no!

LENA

But I won't. I got others to think of.

KINGSTON (*offended*)

Just a minute. What about my consent? None o' ye seems to think that's needed.

WALKER (*embarrassed and anxious*)

Er—really—I—

LENA (*humoring the “head” of her family*)

We ask yer consent now.

KINGSTON (*deliberately*)

Well—I give my consent.

(*His self-respect is restored. The WALKERS are relieved and thankful.*)

WALKER

So *that's* all right. (MARJORIE *invites* LENA *to sit with her near the window. Troubled.*) A few things, though, still require—

(*He takes a cigar and gives one to KINGSTON.*)

MARJORIE

Will, dear, we reopen this house at once, don't we?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

WALKER

Of course. (KINGSTON *begins to open the shutters.*) But if the officers of the law should ever find out how you people came here! They might upset our little social adjustment.

LENA (*laconically*)

Just send 'em to yer housekeeper.

(WALKER, *unburdened, motions KINGSTON to sit beside him near the open window also. The four make a contented group.*)

WALKER (*humorously philosophical at last*)

Rather—(*smiling on LENA*) “funny”—all this.

MARJORIE

It's perfectly wonderful we should ever in the world meet.

LENA

Yes, considerin' we've lived only four years—near by—in one o' yer own houses.

(*The WALKERS exchange a quizzical look, the KINGSTONS a glance of ironic amusement.*)

CURTAIN

THE WEDDING DRESS

A COSTUME PLAY OF COLONIAL DAYS

by PHOEBE HOFFMAN

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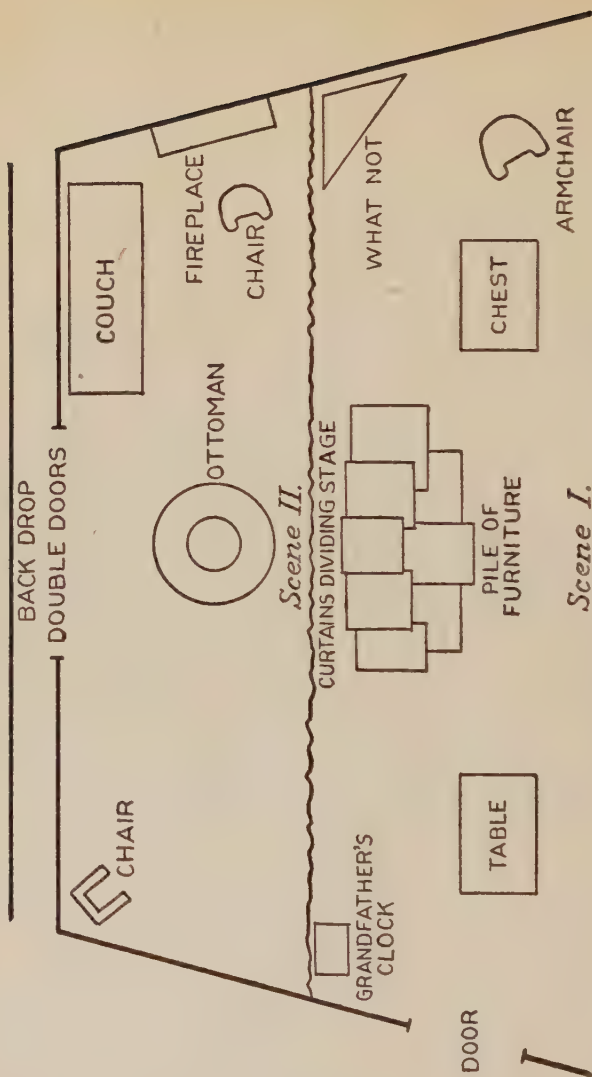
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THE WEDDING DRESS

"The Wedding Dress" takes place in two different settings—a technique that is very unusual in one-act plays—but it will be observed that the episode round which the play is built is complete in itself. The first scene is quite easily managed, being played in an "inset," as it is called in the professional theater. The stage is first arranged for the drawing-room scene, after which curtains or draperies are lowered, dividing the stage in halves. The scene in the attic, which is in the nature of a prologue, is played before the curtains; at its termination the curtains are raised and the stage is ready for the second part. If you would lessen the wait between scenes it is essential that you provide an extra crew of scene shifters to handle the furniture and properties.

Concerning the casting, your director should be careful to choose a NANCY and a MARIA who are physically alike. Much of the success of this charming little romance depends upon the scene in which one sister masquerades as the other.

The characters require no personal properties.



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "THE WEDDING DRESS"

THE WEDDING DRESS

CHARACTERS

HANNAH

NANCY AYRE

EDWARD FARRAGUT

MARIA AYRE

MISS AGATHA AYRE

ASA BINGHAM

JOHN

GENERAL AYRE

TIME: *In the year 1815*

PLACE: *Philadelphia*

SCENE I

The lumber room of a large old-fashioned house, just one corner. Curtains are used as a background. There is a large chest, some broken, discarded furniture, and other attic junk. Door is to the right. HANNAH, a pretty, young woman in maid's costume of the Empire period (a high-waisted dress, full, high-waisted apron, ruffled cap), enters and looks cautiously all about, then she tiptoes back to door and calls apparently from head of attic stairs.

HANNAH (*in a low voice*)

Miss Nancy—

NANCY (*without*)

Yes, Hannah—

HANNAH (*in same tone*)

You'll be safe up here, miss. No one would ever think of your meeting a young gentleman in the attic.

(NANCY enters. She is dressed in a white satin evening gown, Empire, evidently a wedding dress. She has thrown a camel's-hair shawl over her shoulders, as if she had started to go out, but had suddenly decided to come up to the attic instead.)

NANCY (*excited, panting*)

Where's Mr. Farragut?

HANNAH

He's waiting in the garden. Miss Agatha thinks you're in your chamber. You'll be safe for half an hour.

NANCY (*breathless*)

Show him the way here. Quickly, Hannah!

HANNAH

Yes, miss. (*Bubbling over.*) Oh, he's so handsome!—
Not like the one you're going to marry.

NANCY (*with dignity*)

Not a word against Mr. Bingham, Hannah.

HANNAH

I can't help it. The likes of him sat at home and let the British burn Washington. I'm sure Mr. Farragut would have been a general if he'd stayed in the army.

(*She starts to go.*)

NANCY (*recalling her*)

Hannah— Stand guard at the foot of the stairs.

HANNAH

Yes, miss.

NANCY

And if there's any danger—sing.

HANNAH

I'll sing "Annie Laurie"—

NANCY

Sing lustily if there's any one coming.

HANNAH (*sympathetic*)

Trust me, miss.

(*She goes out. NANCY sits on the chest waiting impatiently for FARRAGUT. NANCY is a charming young person, a fascinator. She must be nearly twenty and she should have been married nearly two years ago, according*

THE WEDDING DRESS

to the standards of those days. She fidgets with her shawl and fusses nervously with her hair, which is arranged in classic curls. After what seems to her an interminable period, but really only a moment, FARRAGUT enters. He is about twenty-five, handsome, dashing, romantic, Byronic. He has had a restless, active, adventurous career. He is dressed for riding, and evidently has been traveling hard. His coat is travel-stained, his boots muddy.)

NANCY

Edward!!!

(She leaps up and throws herself joyfully into his arms.)

FARRAGUT (*kissing her*)

Nancy—Nancy, darling!!

NANCY (*recovering herself somewhat after a pause*)

Edward, I heard positively that you were dead.

FARRAGUT

It's a miracle that I'm here at all. (*Kissing her.*) But, thank God!—I'm not too late.

(*They sit on chest. His arm about her waist.*)

NANCY

Edward, if you could only have sent me word. It's two years—

FARRAGUT

When did you last hear from me?

NANCY

From a trading station on the Chicago River—a year and a half ago.

FARRAGUT (*for a moment ceasing to be the lover, speaking directly, the man of action*)

I had no means of sending you word after that. I joined a party of trappers headed for the Northwest. After two weeks' journey hostile Indians attacked us one night. I was the only man left alive. They spared me because I saved a young brave from bleeding to death. But they

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

kept me a close prisoner for over a year. At last I persuaded the brave to give me a rifle and help me escape—

NANCY (*pressing FARRAGUT'S hand*)

Bless him!

FARRAGUT

I traveled over two hundred miles through the wilderness without even a compass to the nearest trading post. Then I came back to you as fast as a horse could carry me.

NANCY (*half articulately*)

Dearest! You must think me the most—

FARRAGUT (*grim, interrupting*)

My cousin Ralph told me!

NANCY (*conscience-stricken*)

Father failed—and Asa—! Oh, he's been so very generous—

FARRAGUT (*sarcastically*)

You told me Bingham was generous the first time we met in Mr. Bartram's garden.

NANCY (*with a sigh*)

Dear Mr. Bartram—how many times I've walked there since—alone.

FARRAGUT (*still sarcastic*)

I'm glad you had the good taste not to walk there with Bingham. (*Indicating her dress.*) I suppose they deviled you into rewarding him—

(*He pricks finger on a pin and draws it away angrily.*)

NANCY

My gown's full of pins. They were trying it on for the last time when your note came, and I started to run down to the garden—and Aunt Agatha cut me off. But I haven't been *deviled* into any dress.

FARRAGUT (*jealous*)

Then you *do* love Bingham?

THE WEDDING DRESS

NANCY

Not the way I love you. He knows that.

FARRAGUT

Nancy, we've got to elope. I've arranged with Hannah that you're to slip out disguised in her gown. I'll be waiting in a post chaise ready to gallop off to Baltimore where we'll be married. Then we'll go to New Orleans by sea. (*Breezily giving her a hug.*) What do you say to that, my dear?

(NANCY *disengages herself from his embrace, rises, and turns away.*)

NANCY (*emotionally*)

No, Edward, no—I can't go.

FARRAGUT (*following her*)

I know New Orleans is a wretched hole. (*In his most earnest and engaging tones.*) But, Nancy, dear, I promise to love you always, and to struggle for you. If you're afraid of the fever?

NANCY (*turning*)

Oh, Edward—I'm not afraid!—I'd rather die of the fever after a month's bliss with you than live to old age with Asa.

FARRAGUT

Then it's settled.

NANCY (*clinging to his sleeve*)

No, Edward!—I can't leave father. He's been ill ever since the loss of his good ship the *Nancy-Maria*. If she had come in to port he could have cleared his debts.

FARRAGUT (*fiercely*)

Nancy, our love counts more than all the money your father owes Asa Bingham. (*Possessively.*) You're coming away with me.

NANCY (*piqued at his tone of command*)

I can't, Edward, I can't. Maria, Father, Aunt Agatha, and I are all dependent on Asa.

FARRAGUT (*impatiently*)

Nancy, you'll have to choose—now or never—!

NANCY (*beginning to weep, indignant*)

I'm not going off like a thief in the night—

FARRAGUT (*also hurt*)

You're most unfair to me—Nancy Ayre.

NANCY (*turning on him*)

You're cruel, Edward! You might at least give me a chance to tell Asa—ask him to release me.

FARRAGUT (*laughing sarcastically*)

You poor girl!—That canny Quaker release you?

NANCY

He's not a Quaker.

FARRAGUT

He has all the traits of one. He won't attempt to argue. He'll tell you quietly what a shiftless fellow I am. How I threw away a chance to be a soldier. Then, after the war I could have been a lawyer—with a practice fatter than the ducks that feed in the salt marshes of Delaware Bay. But lawyering was too dull and I must needs leave my uncle and wing my way northward for adventure. What have I to offer you now? Uncertain prospects in New Orleans?—Yellow fever?

NANCY (*indignantly*)

You're most unjust to Asa.

FARRAGUT (*bitterly*)

No, I'm quite fair. It's all true! When you can marry a tame duck—why go off with a wild goose? He'll convince you—you're mad!

(HANNAH is heard singing "Annie Laurie" on the stairs.)

NANCY (*alarmed*)

Some one's coming!—You must go! At once. (*Moving over to door, calling.*) Hannah?

THE WEDDING DRESS

FARRAGUT (*grasping her hand and trying to draw her with him*)

Nancy, darling!—Come away with me, now.

(*The door opens and MARIA enters breathless and excited. She is about the same height as NANCY and her coloring is similar. She has on a little morning frock of chintz. Her hair is arranged in classic curls. MARIA is nearly as pretty as NANCY, but she has none of her fascination. She is housewifely, sedate, dutiful. To those that know her she has a charming quaintness all her own.*)

MARIA (*distressed*)

Mr. Farragut!—Go, please, please! Aunt Agatha found your note and suspects you're in the house. She's searching downstairs.

FARRAGUT (*pulling NANCY*)

Come, dear!

(*NANCY might yield and come with him if MARIA did not put her arms protectingly about sister.*)

MARIA (*looking sternly at the young man*)

No—Mr. Farragut!

NANCY (*withdrawing her hand, speaking with great effort*)

I must tell Asa. Edward, I'll send you word.

(*She breaks into sobs and buries her head on her sister's shoulder. FARRAGUT is about to make further violent protest when HANNAH sings "Annie Laurie" very clearly and loudly.*)

MARIA (*looking at FARRAGUT with frantic appeal*)

If you love her—go!—Aunt Agatha!—Her reputation!

(*FARRAGUT takes NANCY's hand, kisses it passionately and flies down the stairs. NANCY cries on MARIA's shoulder, who comforts her in motherly fashion.*)

MARIA (*patting her*)

Poor darling! Poor little sister!

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

NANCY (*recovering herself, drying her eyes*)

I must tell Asa. (*Sighing.*) It's going to be a hard task—

MARIA (*taking her sister by the shoulders*)

You're not going to jilt Asa Bingham—now!

NANCY

Jilt is a cruel word.

MARIA

But it's what you're about to do.

NANCY

No. I shall explain about Farragut. When Asa asked me to marry him I told him that I had been secretly engaged to Edward.

MARIA (*horrified*)

But papa?—Our debts?—We owe Asa so much already.

NANCY (*doggedly*)

I can't help that. (*Deep rebellious sigh of youth.*) Why didn't he fall in love with you, Maria? (*Looking at her sister admiringly.*) You're such a quaint, housewifely dear. You'd just match him.

MARIA (*bitterly*)

I suppose you'd stand us on the mantel like a pair of China figures. (*Suddenly pleading BINGHAM's cause passionately.*) Nancy—! You don't know what you're throwing away. Asa doesn't read Byron. He isn't given to humors. He doesn't seek adventures. But he's the most generous, the most important, most cultivated, handsomest young man of our acquaintance.

NANCY (*laughing, astonished*)

Maria—Asa, handsome? Really!

MARIA (*passionately*)

He is! Poor Asa's so helplessly in love you can trample him under your little slipper.

THE WEDDING DRESS

NANCY (*astonished*)

Why, Maria? I never heard you speak so glowingly of a man.

MARIA

What can you see in that madcap Farragut?—Unless it is that he continually makes you unhappy.

NANCY (*suddenly*)

Sister, I believe you're in love with Asa yourself.

MARIA (*indignantly, trying to hide her feelings which have carried her too far*)

Can't I appreciate Asa without being in love with him? (*Emphatic.*) We've both known him ever since we were children.

NANCY (*with conviction*)

But how do you know that I love Farragut because he makes me unhappy unless Asa makes you unhappy also? (*She takes MARIA by the shoulders and shakes her with passionate earnestness.*) Say that you do! Say that you do!

MARIA (*breaking down, turning away, sinking on to chest*)

I do love him—I have, ever since I was seventeen.

NANCY (*delighted*)

I knew it! I knew I was right. But what a sly puss you've been all these years, Maria. That's why Parson Duncan's sermons never bored you. You could look straight over the pew back at Asa and never seem unmaidenly.

MARIA (*petulantly*)

I don't see anything to be so happy about.

NANCY (*gayer than ever*)

Don't you?—You will, when I have eloped with Farragut. (*Coming over to MARIA and hugging her affectionately.*)

I believe all along that Asa has really been in love with

you and just thought he cared for me. But he'll find out soon enough now.

(MARIA *jumps up and starts towards door.*)

MARIA (*aghast*)

Nancy—you can't go off—like this—now. I'll tell Aunt Agatha.

NANCY

Stop! (MARIA *pauses.*) Or I'll tell Asa who's in love with him.

MARIA (*frightened*)

Oh, Nancy—you couldn't be so indelicate.

NANCY

I will—I'm desperate.

MARIA (*turning back, downcast, silenced*)

What are you going to do?

NANCY

Farragut has planned with Hannah that I shall wear her gown and meet him at the London Coffee House.

(*The door flies open and AUNT AGATHA bursts dramatically into the attic. She wears a crackling, black silk, her thin neck concealed by a fichu. She is a gaunt, austere lady, and wears an imposing turban, like those described in the fashion books of that day, with several ostrich feathers, giving a somewhat terrifying effect as she bears down on the girls. Her sensibilities are outraged as she has not been above listening at the keyhole.*)

MISS AGATHA (*in a fury*)

So this is where you meet your lover, you wicked girl!

NANCY (*responding with spirit*)

Go on. Look for him, Aunt Agatha. It's a grand game of hide and seek.

MISS AGATHA (*continuing*)

And you were going to elope in Hannah's gown? Meet him at the London Coffee House like a vulgar servant?

THE WEDDING DRESS

NANCY

You were not above listening at the keyhole yourself, Aunt Agatha—isn't that what servants do?

MISS AGATHA (*in a fury*)

You saucy girl! You ought to be chastised soundly—for your impudence. If your father wasn't mush when it came to women, he'd do it, too. What's to become of us all I'd like to know—after you've ruined us.

NANCY (*beginning to protest*)

But, Aunt Agatha, father won't be ruined—really—

MISS AGATHA

If Asa Bingham knew of this escapade he wouldn't touch you—

NANCY (*excited*)

Then I'll go and tell him myself.

(*She starts towards door and tries to slip by Miss AGATHA.*)

MISS AGATHA (*blocking door and catching NANCY by wrist*)

No, you don't.

NANCY (*in pain*)

Aunt Agatha, let me go!

MISS AGATHA

Don't you Aunt Agatha me! In my days girls were brought up to do as they were told, and marry the men their fathers picked out for them. You're going to stay right up here under lock and key until it's time for you to come down and be properly married!

(*She steps out of the attic quickly before either of the girls can prevent her. The door bangs to, and the big old-fashioned key is heard grating loudly in the rusty lock. NANCY and MARIA stand looking at each other aghast as the curtain falls.*)

END OF SCENE I

SCENE II

A drawing-room that is still pre-Revolutionary in its furniture and, therefore, very old-fashioned for the year 1815. Fireplace to the left, over which hangs portrait of important gentleman in a powdered wig. One or two other portraits of dignified ancestors hang about on the walls. The room is handsome, but beginning to look shabby. It is a room representing the past wealth of its owners who have passed the height of their prosperity, and are turning into real aristocrats, the kind whose descendants now own priceless antiques because their ancestors were too poor to turn out their Sheridan and Chippendale to buy the newer Empire and Victorian furniture. There are only a few pieces of furniture in the room, however, as it has been cleared for the wedding. Several chairs and a couch have been shoved back against the wall.

TIME: Two hours later.

At rise of the curtain, JOHN, a shabby old darky butler, but a butler with an air, is lighting the candles in the branched silver candelabra on the mantelpiece. MISS AGATHA enters wearing same costume as in Scene I. She looks approvingly about the room.

MISS AGATHA

John, serve supper right after the ceremony.

JOHN

Yes, ma'am.

MISS AGATHA

Five more guests, John. Mrs. Biddle just sent round a note by hand. She is bringing her cousins, who have just arrived from Virginia.

JOHN (*reverently*)

Yes, ma'am. I guess all de quality in Philadelphia'll darken dese doors to-night. Some of de young ladies in dis town must have cried deir eyes out envyin' Miss Nancy—

THE WEDDING DRESS

MISS AGATHA

I take some of the credit for this match, John.

JOHN (*respectfully*)

Yes, ma'am.

MISS AGATHA (*coming back to business*)

Serve the terrapin plentifully to all the important people
—but skimp some of—the unimportant—

JOHN (*comprehensively*)

Yes, ma'am. And de wine? Do you want dat served
first or last?

MISS AGATHA

What do you mean?

JOHN

Well, I didn't know whether you wanted it like de host
in de parable, or de other way round.

MISS AGATHA (*severely*)

Serve the 1745 port first.

JOHN

Yes, ma'am. Like de parable.

MISS AGATHA

Anything else, John?

JOHN

No, ma'am.

(*She goes out. JOHN is about to go back to his candles
when a tremendous knocking sets the whole house front
shaking. JOHN goes trembling to the door.*)

JOHN (*without, soothing, frightened*)

Yes—Massa Bingham—Yes, sah.

BINGHAM (*opening door and striding into room*)

I must see the general at once—and Miss Nancy, too.

JOHN (*without*)

Yes, sah.

(BINGHAM *must have been dressing for his wedding when he heard bad news. He wears evening dress of the period, dark coat, flowered waistcoat, high white stock, tight trousers with strap passing under boot. He is a man of medium height with pleasant, somewhat irregularly handsome face, now drawn with suffering. His hair is disordered, his coat flung on.*)

BINGHAM (*pacing moodily between fireplace and door, muttering to himself*)

Damn Farragut! Damn Farragut!

(*Another attack on the front door knocker sets the house vibrating once more, and FARRAGUT, brushing JOHN aside, bursts into the room. He is dressed same as in Scene I. More agitated and distracted if possible.*)

BINGHAM (*collecting himself, surveying FARRAGUT with a cold sarcastic look*)

So, it's you, Farragut?

FARRAGUT (*speaking brokenly, still catching his breath*)

Bingham, Nancy and I love each other! For God's sake release her. I went to your house and they told me you'd gone on—

BINGHAM (*controlling himself, between his teeth*)

Why do you come to me—now!—When you tried to steal her behind my back?

FARRAGUT (*highly excited*)

Steal her—did I? Wasn't she engaged to me first? If it wasn't for the pressure her family had put on her she would have been faithful to me—dead or alive. (*Pleading.*) If you love her, be generous, Bingham, give her back her promise.

BINGHAM (*slowly, bitterly, keeping his temper, studying the other man*)

I don't think there's much question of giving her back when she tried to elope with you.

THE WEDDING DRESS

FARRAGUT (*wild, surprised*)

Elope! She planned to elope with me after all! (*Stepping up to him.*) God! Bingham, give me her note. (*Holding out bit of crumpled paper.*) I received one that was intended for you.

BINGHAM (*stepping out of FARRAGUT'S reach, astutely seizing his advantage*)

I certainly shall not give up that note.

FARRAGUT (*following him, frantically*)

You shall—I say. I'll force you!

(*He puts his hand on BINGHAM'S shoulder. The latter shakes himself free with a good deal of unexpected strength. FARRAGUT reels back a step or two.*)

BINGHAM (*with spirit*)

You can't persuade me by force, Farragut. I have a fair advantage and I intend to use it.

FARRAGUT

If you won't release Nancy I shall break in at the ceremony.

BINGHAM

No, you won't.

FARRAGUT

Why do you want to cling on to Nancy? Maria's the girl for you—the girl you really love.

BINGHAM

What? You're mad, Farragut. Of course I love Nancy. I know my own mind.

FARRAGUT (*excited*)

Be prepared to fight for her then. I'll meet you any place—any hour—your choice of arms.

BINGHAM (*controlled*)

I won't quarrel, Farragut. No use trying. Nancy must settle for herself which of us she wishes to marry. I've sent for her and for the general.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

FARRAGUT (*impatiently*)

I can't play your subtle games, Bingham. With the general backing your arguments she'll be forced into choosing you. Will you fight me to win—or lose?

BINGHAM

No, I will not.

(GENERAL AYRE *enters*. *He was the youngest general in Washington's army, and still has the healthy blustering carriage which earned him the nickname of "Old Red, White and Blue."* *He has the vigor of the eighteenth century and some of its coarse-grainedness. His language is slightly old-fashioned for the year 1815. The bluff soldier has never quite sunk into the peaceful merchant. He is in a splendid humor. ASA's marriage with NANCY will clear his debts and settle the family in comfort. He comes in rubbing his hands, his face wreathed in smiles.*)

GENERAL (*genially*)

Well, Bingham, well!—Come, let's drink a glass of port to the bride's health.

(*Suddenly he sees FARRAGUT and steps back aghast. His smile withers. He is most disagreeably surprised.*)

GENERAL (*dazed*)

Thundering Jupiter! Farragut, are you a ghost?

FARRAGUT (*drawing himself up, giving GENERAL a military salute*)

No, sir! I'm still in the land of the living.

(BINGHAM *tactfully withdraws to back of room.*)

FARRAGUT (*continuing*)

Before I went away Nancy promised to marry me. (GENERAL *scowls; the news is unpleasant.*) I have returned after two years' captivity to put in a prior claim for her hand.

GENERAL (*stroking his chin, nonplused, very much annoyed at the turn events have taken*)

This is the first I have heard of your intentions, sir.

THE WEDDING DRESS

FARRAGUT (*still standing erect, heels together*)

We didn't mean to be undutiful, sir, but Nancy and I decided that it was best to keep the engagement a secret, my prospects were so uncertain.

GENERAL (*frowning*)

Uncertain?—when your uncle had promised you his practice?

FARRAGUT

I wasn't cut out to be a lawyer, sir.

GENERAL (*ironic*)

Oddslife! You must be a most peculiar cut, Farragut. You weary of being a soldier and you can't stick the law.

FARRAGUT

I wanted to make a fortune for Nancy. The quickest way seemed in the fur trade. I would have come back a rich man if I hadn't been captured by Indians. I risked my life for her. (*Pleading.*) Sir, as a soldier and a frontiersman, isn't that enough? We love each other!

GENERAL (*who has been listening in mounting perplexity*)

Very romantic, Farragut! But if you wished to marry Nancy why didn't you keep on with a profession that at least promised you a livelihood?

FARRAGUT

Nancy, herself, urged me to go. She knew that I would be unhappy as a lawyer.

GENERAL

You made her very unhappy. She nearly pined away with suspense and anxiety. Its nigh a year and a half since you were given up for lost. She is to marry Asa Bingham within an hour. (*Strengthening his convictions with a look at ASA.*) I know he is the right husband for Nancy and I have to consider her happiness.

FARRAGUT (*bitterly*)

You mean your happiness, General Ayre.

GENERAL (*forcefully*)

Oddslife! Farragut, I do not. She's devoted to Bingham. If you and she had a youthful romance she has got over it—and you had best forget it, too.

FARRAGUT

I have no intention of forgetting it, sir.

GENERAL (*worried, coming to him*)

Farragut, for God's sake, go! You will make her unhappy if you stay here and open old wounds.

FARRAGUT (*confidently, standing his ground*)

Nancy knows I've come back, sir.

GENERAL (*angry, alarmed*)

You've seen her?

FARRAGUT (*daringly*)

I have, sir, and she'd be on the post road to Baltimore with me now, if her note for me hadn't been given to Bingham by mistake—

(*The GENERAL is so angry that he looks as if he were about to swell up and burst.*)

GENERAL (*finding voice after a moment*)

Oddslife! Thundering Jupiter!—So you'd elope?—Elope with my daughter?

FARRAGUT (*quite unmoved*)

There seemed no other way, sir.

GENERAL (*sputtering*)

Thundering Jupiter! You dare come to my house and tell me so. Are there no bounds to your impudence?—The license of young people nowadays!

FARRAGUT

Adam first said that to Cain.

GENERAL (*his anger mounting*)

Damme! I'll show you—and I'll show Nancy—

(*He goes over to bell rope and pulls it so violently that*

THE WEDDING DRESS

the rope breaks in his hand. He throws piece petulantly across the room. The bell clangs audibly.)

GENERAL (*continuing his tirade*)

I'll show Nancy that I'm her father and an old soldier. I wasn't the first officer across the Delaware—I wasn't the youngest general in the army—Thundering Jupiter!—my men didn't call me "Old Red, White, and Blue" for nothing. I knew how to make them obey a command.

FARRAGUT (*quickly*)

And they knew just how to take "Roaring Ayre."

GENERAL (*turning on him fiercely*)

Oddslife, sir! What did you say?

FARRAGUT (*saluting again*)

Only, sir, that your tradition has lingered on in the army.

GENERAL (*in a towering rage, pacing up and down*)

Damn your impudence! Mr. Farragut, if you were the last man on earth I wouldn't allow Nancy to marry you—by gad!

FARRAGUT

Nancy may have some wishes on the subject, sir.

GENERAL (*in a passion*)

Will you leave this house, or must I have you thrown out?

FARRAGUT (*standing his ground*)

I shall leave when Nancy dismisses me.

(JOHN taps at the door.)

JOHN

You rang, sah.

GENERAL (*in a loud voice*)

John, tell Miss Agatha to bring down Miss Nancy, at once. Then go yourself to Parson Duncan and tell him the wedding will take place immediately.

JOHN (*without*)

Yes, sah!

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GENERAL (*turning to FARRAGUT*)

Now, sir, will you go?

FARRAGUT

No, sir.

GENERAL

Then, by Jupiter! I warn you she shall marry Bingham before your eyes.

(BINGHAM comes forward indignantly.)

BINGHAM

General Ayre, this is outrageous! You're haggling about Nancy, as if she were a sheep or a dog to be traded off to the highest bidder. She shall choose for herself whether she wishes to marry Farragut or me.

GENERAL (*testily*)

Gad! Bingham, she's not your daughter!

BINGHAM (*with spirit*)

And she shan't be my wife, either, unless she wishes it.

GENERAL (*autocratically*)

Parson Duncan shall marry her to you—now!

BINGHAM

It takes two to make a wedding.

GENERAL (*looking at him, surprised*)

Heyday! I thought you loved the female!

BINGHAM (*with feeling*)

I do.

FARRAGUT (*impulsively*)

Bingham, I was most unjust—unfair!

BINGHAM (*holding out his hand*)

I told you I would be an honest rival, Farragut.

(*The two men shake hands. MISS AGATHA enters holding poor NANCY firmly by the arm. Both are in same costume as in Scene I. NANCY has muffled the shawl closely about her face.*)

THE WEDDING DRESS

MISS AGATHA (*proudly as she releases NANCY*)

There she is, Harry. I kept her safe.

GENERAL (*bearing down on NANCY*)

So, madam, you were going to elope with *Mr. Farragut*?

MISS AGATHA (*excited*)

She was going to elope in Hannah's gown and meet him at the London Coffee House—like a servant.

GENERAL

Thundering Jupiter! You young men lack spirit. Why didn't you go to the tryst yourself and carry off the wench and treat her like the serving lass she pretended to be. (*Chuckling.*) 'Twould have served her right.

MISS AGATHA (*scandalized*)

Harry, you needn't be so coarse!

GENERAL

Oddslife, Aggy! Can't we joke at a wedding? The parson's coming to marry them right away.

MISS AGATHA (*horrified*)

Now! But it's an hour before the time.

GENERAL

I tell you she's going to be married—now.

MISS AGATHA (*in a flurry*)

Nancy can never be married without her veil—and Maria.

GENERAL (*bluntly*)

Well, bring down any trappings you may wish to hang on her.

MISS AGATHA

But, Harry, I shan't let her out of my sight.

GENERAL (*doggedly*)

She's not going to budge from here.

MISS AGATHA (*starting to protest*)

Fiddlededee, Harry! (*But a look from her brother si-*

lences her.) Very well, I'll bring down the veil and order Maria to dress.

(She goes out. All this time NANCY has stood very quiet and still, her face muffled in the shawl. She has made several furtive signals to FARRAGUT, but he has been too excited to heed them.)

FARRAGUT *(going to her)*

Nancy, darling! Speak up! Tell your father that you love me and you won't marry any one else.

(NANCY is silent. She stands looking at the ground.)

BINGHAM *(on the other side)*

Nancy, dear, we both love you. You know what each of us has to offer. Choose, dear, whichever one of us will make you happiest. We have only your happiness at heart.

(Overcome, NANCY sways suddenly forward as if about to faint. FARRAGUT catches her quickly in his arms. She closes her eyes and rapidly murmurs something half articulate. The GENERAL interrupts at once.)

GENERAL *(interfering)*

Damme, sir! Let go of my daughter—this minute.

(FARRAGUT lays her on couch in back of room.)

NANCY *(sitting up, speaking in a dazed, husky voice)*

How silly of me!

FARRAGUT *(bending over her)*

My poor sweetheart!

NANCY *(motioning him back with her hand)*

No, Mr. Farragut—

FARRAGUT *(protesting)*

Mr. Farragut—Nancy—

NANCY *(half sobbing, in same husky voice)*

It's Asa that I choose.

FARRAGUT *(staggered, incredulous)*

Asa!!!!

THE WEDDING DRESS

NANCY (*sobbing, keeping her face carefully to the wall*)
Yes.

(BINGHAM comes over to couch. For a moment he is delighted, then he looks at her uncertain, suspicious of so unexpected an outcome.)

FARRAGUT (*gasping*)

But your vows—to me—an hour ago.

GENERAL (*pleasantly surprised, rubbing his hands together gleefully*)

Nancy, lass, you have more sense than I supposed—

NANCY (*sobbing, to FARRAGUT*)

I've changed my mind.

FARRAGUT (*refusing to believe her; like most men of action his minds works directly, not in subtle methods*)

Nancy, you're still dazed. You don't know what you're saying.

NANCY (*still keeping her face averted*)

I do—Mr. Farragut. I realize that papa is right about Asa.

(BINGHAM cocks an ear at "papa." Nancy always says "father.")

BINGHAM (*stepping forward, taking her*)

Dearest, are you sure?

NANCY (*pressing his hand though she still keeps her face concealed*)

Yes, Asa. Quite certain.

FARRAGUT (*taking her shoulder*)

Nancy—'tis impossible.

NANCY (*trying to draw away*)

Please, let me go, Mr. Farragut.

FARRAGUT (*desperate*)

I won't!—Nancy, I can't relinquish you to him.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

BINGHAM (*suddenly breaking in, in a very quiet, firm voice*)
Maria, what have you done with Nancy?

GENERAL and FARRAGUT (*simultaneously*)
What?

(*They both turn facing the girl.*)

FARRAGUT (*first to recover from the shock of this revelation*)

Maria!!—You?

BINGHAM

Where's Nancy, Maria?

GENERAL (*stepping forward, pulling shawl from her face, in a fury*)

Thundering Jupiter! You deceitful minx. (*Disgusted.*)
You're no child of mine!

FARRAGUT (*breathless*)

Where is Nancy?

MARIA (*in a small frightened voice*)

Waiting in St. Peter's churchyard.

FARRAGUT (*hastily kissing her hand*)

God bless you, Maria.

(*He dashes hastily from the room, almost colliding with MISS AGATHA, who enters excited, breathless, holding NANCY'S wedding veil. She pauses to give FARRAGUT a look of fierce indignation as he closes the door behind him.*)

MISS AGATHA

I can't find Maria.

(*GENERAL makes a motion of his hand towards the sofa.*)

MISS AGATHA (*turning, squeaking*)

Ah—Maria!!

GENERAL

Exactly, Maria!—Nancy's flown the coop.

THE WEDDING DRESS

MISS AGATHA (*cheated, outraged, venting her wrath on MARIA*)

You wicked girl, you wicked jade! So this is the way you repay your father's kindness—my lavish care! I risked my life to nurse you when you had the scarletina.

GENERAL (*interrupting*)

Agatha, I—

MISS AGATHA

No, I'm going to finish! I gave up my chances of happiness to look after your motherless children. And this is my reward!—This is gratitude. (*Turning to GENERAL.*) You always interfered with my discipline. Now I hope you're satisfied with the result. If I'd taken my chance—if they'd been my children.

GENERAL (*brutally after the manner of brothers*)

You never had a chance, Aggy—so stop talking!

MISS AGATHA (*with a toss of her head*)

Much you know indeed! (*Turning on MARIA who has remained seated on couch, slightly dazed.*) If you have no filial sense of duty I should think your obligations to Mr. Bingham would have guided your conduct. Instead of tricking him out of his bride—and making him ridiculous before the whole town—

(*She has the desired effect on MARIA, who bursts into tears.*)

BINGHAM (*stepping in between, sternly*)

Miss Agatha, please—please—

MARIA (*rebellious, through her tears*)

Any means were fair—after you locked us up.

GENERAL (*on whom it has dawned for the first time*)

Locked you up!!

MARIA (*still tremulous*)

Yes, Aunt Agatha locked us up in the attic—

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

BINGHAM (*taking her hand, speaking gently*)

Maria, you mustn't cry.

GENERAL (*venting his wrath conveniently on Miss AGATHA*)

Sister, how dare you lock up my girls without my consent?

MISS AGATHA (*frightened for the moment*)

I did it for the best—really, Harry. Nancy was plotting to elope in Hannah's gown.

MARIA (*taking courage from BINGHAM's kindness*)

Aunt Agatha, if you'd only shown her a little sympathy—you might have dissuaded her.

MISS AGATHA (*sharply*)

It's not for you to lecture me about my feelings, Miss—!

MARIA (*on the verge of a real cry*)

Papa!—I'm going up to my room—

(BINGHAM *walks over to door ready to open it for her. He watches her admiringly.*)

GENERAL (*coming to her, giving her a kindly pat on the back*)

Come, lass, don't be so downhearted! Nancy's flown the nest now. There's no help for it. (*He leads her back to sofa and makes her sit down.*) Gad! but you've more of the old spark in you than I thought possible.

MARIA

A few minutes ago you almost disowned me.

GENERAL

That was before I realized that Aggy had locked you up in the attic. (*Patting her back.*) We'll have a real wedding for you some day! Pity we aren't Moslems! There'd be plenty of bidding for your hand. They want a father's daughter. (*Reminiscently.*) The British had me in a tight corner once—locked in, by Gad!—I dressed myself up as a redcoat officer and walked right through their lines. (*Bluffly and not too tactfully.*) We'll find a handsome husband for you yet.

THE WEDDING DRESS

MARIA (*embarrassed, disengaging herself from her father*)
Oh, papa, please don't. (*She goes quickly towards door, pausing, speaking to BINGHAM.*) Asa—I didn't mean to trick you—or keep up the deception so long. (*Looking at him pleadingly.*) Asa—say that you forgive me—

BINGHAM (*taking her hand*)
There's nothing to forgive, dear Maria—

MARIA
But I deceived you—

BINGHAM (*dropping her hand*)
I was beginning to hope that you had not deceived me.
(*JOHN taps at door as BINGHAM is about to open it.*)

JOHN (*without*)
Parson Duncan, sir.

GENERAL (*gruffly*)
Tell him to go home again, John.
(*MISS AGATHA suddenly becomes hysterical and runs round room aimlessly as a hen, wringing her hands.*)

MISS AGATHA (*in a state*)
But the wedding?—the guests?—the collation? Nancy's shamed us before the whole town. (*She subsides sobbing into a chair. Her feathers bob violently to and fro.*) Mrs. Biddle's bringing the Randolphs from Virginia and she'll have to tell them. I've worked so hard over this wedding! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! what are we going to do—

BINGHAM (*bitterly*)
Best tell them the truth—that Nancy changed her mind.

GENERAL (*annoyed, mortified*)
Thundering Jupiter! but we will look a pretty lot of half-plucked geese!

MARIA
We might say she's been suddenly taken ill.

BINGHAM
You're only postponing the evil.

MISS AGATHA (*looking up suddenly*)

Maria, come here! (*Drying her eyes and picking up veil which has fallen on the floor.*) You're the image of Nancy in that dress. I believe that I can arrange the veil so that in candlelight you might pass for the bride—

BINGHAM (*quickly, in a muffled tone*)

I won't ask Maria to do any more pretending.

MARIA (*coming to him, looking up penitently into his face, taking both his hands*)

Asa, I'll do anything—pretend to be the bride even—if that'll make the situation less painful to you.

GENERAL (*bluntly*)

Why pretend? Why not marry Asa? She's a chip off the old block, Asa, and much the best baggage of the two.

MARIA (*dropping BINGHAM's hands, turning indignantly on her father*)

Papa—how can you?—When Asa loves Nancy?

GENERAL

Well, my dear, he might cultivate his taste and learn to love you.

(*MARIA, overcome, mortified, turns away and hides her face.*)

MARIA (*sobbing*)

Oh, papa!

BINGHAM (*turning indignantly on GENERAL*)

Really, sir, have you no consideration for her delicacy of feeling—

(*He goes to MARIA, puts his arm comfortingly round her waist and draws her gently towards door.*)

BINGHAM

Dear Maria, I shall not ask you to marry me when you do not love me. It's just like you—always ready to sacrifice yourself.

THE WEDDING DRESS

MISS AGATHA (*tartly*)

Sacrifice herself! Fiddlededee! She's been hoping for this all along.

MARIA (*whirling round, furious*)

Aunt Agatha!

MISS AGATHA

Yes, I heard you telling Nancy in the garret.

MARIA

I'm going to leave this house. First you, then papa—

(*Inarticulate with rage she starts to open door.*)

BINGHAM (*blocking her*)

Maria, wait.

(*His tone of command calms her and she stands quite still.*)

MARIA (*with her head down*)

Yes?

BINGHAM

Were you pretending—just now when you told Farragut that you chose me?

MARIA (*in a small voice*)

No.

BINGHAM (*joyfully*)

Then you do love —me after all.

MARIA (*looking up at him, bewildered*)

Yes—but—

BINGHAM

Farragut told me that I was in love with you. I laughed at him, but I knew he was absolutely right when you said I choose Asa. And then I recognized you—

JOHN (*tapping at door*)

Where shall I show Parson Duncan, sir?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GENERAL (*loudly*)

Tell him to come in.

(BINGHAM *kisses her* and MISS AGATHA *approaches with veil*. He takes MARIA'S hand and they face door side by side, waiting to greet the parson.)

CURTAIN

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

A BURLESQUE

by JOHN PARRISH

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WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

"When the Clock Strikes" is a travesty on the popular detective play. In it Mr. Parrish has included all the time-worn bits from the big successes of this kind: "The Bat," "The Cat and the Canary," "Bulldog Drummond," etc. The secret of its success in presentation lies in the exaggerated manner of its playing. Miss Kathleen Kirkwood, who first staged the burlesque at the Triangle Theater, New York, offers the following advice to directors: "To get the best results from your cast, treat the whole thing as a huge joke." For example, in her production a revolver was fired rapidly three times before the curtain rose, followed by a scream and a police whistle. This, of course, had nothing to do with the play, but it put the audience in the frame of mind to expect anything. Not only should the actors exaggerate their parts by "overplaying," but the scenic artist should provide a setting which also reflects the spirit of burlesque.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR MR. VAN DYKE

Bonds
Book

FOR THE RAJAH

Hammer and chisel

FOR PERCY VAN DYKE, JR.

Bottle and glass

MADAME BOZO

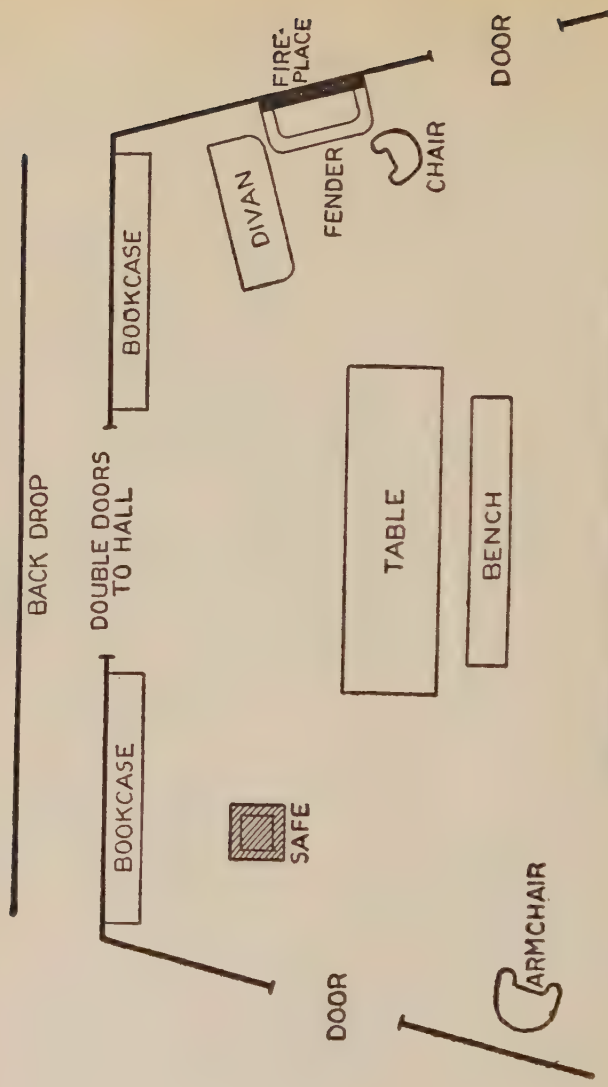
Gentleman's watch

FOR JOHN JONES

Magnifying glass
Policeman's whistle
Book
Revolver

MARY RILEY

Book
Revolver



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES"

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

CHARACTERS

(In order of their appearance)

MR. PERCY VAN DYKE, *wealthy pretzel manufacturer*

RAJAH, *his butler (Oriental)*

MADAME BOZO, *famous phrenologist, who is to entertain*

MRS. VAN DYKE, *his wife*

JOHN JONES, *police commissioner*

MR. PERCY VAN DYKE, JR., *Van Dyke's son*

MARY RILEY, *six-year-old child of Mrs. Riley, a friend of the Van Dykes*

SCENE: *Fashionable parlor of the Van Dykes, done up in the Oriental style. As many doors as possible. A safe (old bread box).*

TIME: *Eight o'clock Wednesday night.*

Discovered: Blank stage. MR. VAN DYKE enters, takes out some papers from his pocket, looks at them, opens the safe and puts them in.

VAN DYKE, SR.

At last. A good day's work. One million dollars' worth of bonds. *(Puts in safe.)* I'll put you by for a rainy day. *(Sits in large armchair, reading a book; is unseen.)*

(RAJAH, his Oriental butler, enters, looks about, goes to safe and starts to break it open with a large hammer and chisel.)

VAN DYKE, SR. *(looks over his chair)*

Rajah, what are you doing?

RAJAH

I am fixing the safe.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

VAN DYKE, SR.

What's the matter with it?

RAJAH

It is not safe.

VAN DYKE, SR.

No, why?

RAJAH

Because it is locked.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Really. What makes you think so?

RAJAH (*suddenly*)

Tell me, Mr. Van Dyke, did you not get an evil letter to-day?

VAN DYKE, SR. (*jumps*)

Yes, how did you know?

RAJAH

Ah, Rajah knows all things.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Then, for heaven's sake, tell me who sent it?

RAJAH

Let me see it. (*Takes it and reads.*) "To-night, when the clock strikes, you shall die." Ah, let me think—

VAN DYKE, SR.

Who sent it, tell me?

RAJAH

Ah, I know, but you must give me time. Ya ka ha ka, Ya ka ha ka, which means in our tongue, "There is a right time for all things." Just be patient, and trust me; sit down and read your book, and trust.

(VAN DYKE, SR., *sits, reading*, RAJAH *bangs aways at safe, opens it, and takes the bonds, puts them on his person, starts banging safe again.*)

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

VAN DYKE, SR.

Damn it, Rajah, that racket is terrible. I can't read.

RAJAH

Very well, sir, I am through. I did what I wanted to do.
The safe is now safe.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Really? Good! How did you do it?

RAJAH

You see, when a safe is locked, it is suspicious and people know there is something valuable in it and try to break in, but when it is open like this, no one would think of bothering with it. Now it is safe.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Rajah, you are wonderful. What would I do without you? From now on, you are not only my butler, but my private detective as well.

RAJAH

Thank you, but you must soon do without me.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Don't say that, anything but that!

RAJAH

Ah, but I must soon go. I have done my work and my country calls me.

VAN DYKE, SR.

But you will not leave me to-night. I need you—about that note. (*Reads.*) "To-night, when the clock strikes, you shall die." Ah, I know, very simple. I shall destroy the clock.

RAJAH

No. Oh, no.

VAN DYKE, SR.

No?

RAJAH

No. If the clock does not strike, you will not be mur-

dered, and if you are not murdered, how can we find the murderer; the one who wrote that letter.

VAN DYKE, SR.

That's so, Rajah, you are wonderful! You shall not only be my butler and my private detective, but you shall be also my hors d'œuvres.

RAJAH

Very good, sir, what is that?

VAN DYKE, SR.

Why, it er—er. I don't know exactly. It's French; it's very grand. It's a lot of little things. So instead of your being my butler, my detective, my this and that, I shall call you my hors d'œuvres.

RAJAH

Yes, sir, I have never been an hors d'œuvre before, but I shall be glad to be your hors d'œuvre.

VAN DYKE, SR.

So, I am to be murdered to-night. That's too bad. Here I am in the prime of life, very wealthy. Why, in that safe, I have just a little part of my wealth, bonds worth a million. Yes, it's too bad.

RAJAH

Don't you worry about those bonds, I'll watch out for them.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Some one is coming. Let us go and play a game of billiards, before our guests arrive.

(They exit. MADAME BOZO enters, looks around, goes to cabinet, takes out something and puts it on her person.)

MRS. VAN DYKE *(entering from another door)*

I beg your pardon, but I did not hear you announced.

MADAME BOZO

Oh, Mrs. Van Dyke, I presume. Charmed. Surely, Mr. Van Dyke told you of my coming. I am the famous

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

Madame Bozo, the world's famous phrenologist. I am to entertain your guests to-night.

MRS. VAN DYKE (*surprised*)

Guests? So, we are to have a party to-night.

MADAME BOZO

Oh, yes.

MRS. VAN DYKE

Strange, my husband forgot to tell me—

MADAME BOZO

Oh, I assure you—

MRS. VAN DYKE (*significantly*)

Yes, I am quite aware you know more about my husband than I do. You needn't rub it in.

MADAME BOZO

Such an attitude is uncalled for. Especially as you must know this evening your husband is to be murdered.

MRS. VAN DYKE

My husband murdered to-night! But why?

MADAME BOZO

Such a silly question.

MRS. VAN DYKE

That's strange. But why doesn't he tell me these things? Let me see. (*Counting on her fingers.*) To-day is Wednesday: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Impossible, we can't have a funeral Friday, I am giving an opera party Friday.

POLICE COMMISSIONER (*entering*)

Ah, Mrs. Van Dyke, there you are!

MRS. VAN DYKE

Oh, Mr. Jones, I am so glad to see you. Meet Madame Bozo.

(MADAME BOZO *shrinks*, POLICE COMMISSIONER *recognizes her.*)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Yes, we have had the pleasure before: the last time we met was in Pittsburgh, was it not, *Red Light Annie*?

MADAME BOZO

No, no; you have me wrong, dead wrong. That was my twin sister.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Oh, very well, forgive me, my error. It shan't happen again. I shall send you an apology, signed by the mayor, at once.

MADAME BOZO

Thank you, no hurry. (*Taking his watch.*) Any time will do.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Pardon me for insulting your guest.

MRS. VAN DYKE

That's all right. I would have made the same mistake. But tell me, captain, something of—rather importance has come to my attention. I have just been informed that my husband is to be murdered to-night.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Yes, I know, that's why I'm here.

MADAME BOZO

Why are you here?

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Why? Because the police *should* be here.

MADAME BOZO

Yes?

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Yes. They should be wherever there is crime. Don't you think so?

MADAME BOZO

Certainly. Sometimes they are.

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Well, so do I. Now, Mrs. Van Dyke?

MRS. VAN DYKE

Well, captain, this murder must not take place to-night.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

No?

MRS. VAN DYKE

No. It must be postponed a day.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Why not two days?

MRS. VAN DYKE

Well, because to-day is Wednesday, and that would make the funeral come on Friday, and I can't have a funeral on Friday.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Why not?

MRS. VAN DYKE

Well, that's nobody's business, but I can't.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

All right. All right. Let's retire to the billiard room.

(Exeunt all three.)

VAN DYKE, JR. *(enters, looks around, goes to another cabinet, takes out a bottle and takes a drink in a glass, pours another drink, only a drop comes out)*

Ah, the last drop!

(Starts to drink, father enters.)

VAN DYKE, SR.

At last, so this is how you have been doublecrossing your aged father. I never thought it of you.

VAN DYKE, JR.

I cannot tell a lie, father.

(Starts to drink, again.)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

VAN DYKE, SR.

Wait, didn't you just have a drink?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Yes.

VAN DYKE, SR.

Well, have you forgotten our agreement; that we were to share it glass and glass alike? Have you sunk so low?

VAN DYKE, JR.

But this is different, father; this is the last drop.

(Starts to drink, again.)

VAN DYKE, SR.

Wait, you infidel! *(Hears some one coming.)* There's some one coming, put it away, put it away! (VAN DYKE, JR., *drinks it.*) Did you put it away?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Yes, yes; I put it away, safe away.

MARY RILEY *(the six-year-old daughter of Mrs. Riley, a friend of the VAN DYKES)*

Good evening, Mr. Van Dyke. How are you? Mother couldn't come, so she sent me. She didn't want to be bored, but I don't see why I should be the one to suffer. As I remember, your affairs *are* rather tiring. Well, I'll see how long I can stand it. Mother said I could stay for the night; of course I'd stay anyway, if I felt so inclined, regardless. I'm one of those people who tell the truth—it's the only way—saves a lot of trouble. I've been trying to get mother to read up on it, but I guess she's too old; yes, she's soon thirty, you know. The "Inner Self," that's it, great stuff!

VAN DYKE, SR.

You think you're pretty smart, don't you?

MARY RILEY

Was that remark necessary, Mr. Van Dyke?

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

VAN DYKE, SR.

(Bells ring, everybody appears on scene.)

Well, my friends, we have with us this evening a very famous celebrity, who will entertain us this evening. Allow me to introduce Madame Bozo, the world's famous phrenologist.

(Applause.)

MADAME BOZO

Good evening, my friends. The day is not far distant when phrenology will come into its own. Of course, only those people who are ignorant discredit this great science.

(Applause.)

MARY RILEY

I beg your pardon, Bozo, but I am *not* ignorant, but I *do* discredit this phrenology stuff. It's hokum, hokum of the first rank.

(Applause.)

VAN DYKE, SR.

Now, Miss Riley, if you—

(The clock strikes, the lights go out, a shot is heard, VAN DYKE falls dead.)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Everybody stand perfectly still, just where you are, by the order of the Police Department. Lights up, please; lights up, I said. *(Lights go up. To the little girl.)* Now, my little girl, you run along and go to bed, please.

MARY RILEY

All right, captain; I'm tired anyway. This phrenology stuff gets on my nerves. Good night, folks.

ALL

Good night, dear.

POLICE COMMISSIONER *(RAJAH runs out the door)*

Did that grease-ball run away?

MADAME BOZO

Yes, captain.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Oh, well, I don't think he did it anyway. (*RAJAH comes back, stands guarding the door.*) Now, my dear friends, we are facing a very serious matter. Mr. Van Dyke, who was a great man, a great philanthropist, and without a doubt the greatest manufacturer of pretzels in the world, a moment ago was addressing us with a smile, in the best of health, and now he lies foully murdered before our eyes. Not only that, but the murderer is in this room and must be apprehended. As you no doubt know, I am the police commissioner, and right now, my word is law. A crime has been committed, and I think the Police Department should get after all crime. At least that is my personal opinion; what do you think? (*Applause.*) Now I have you all here, one of you is guilty. If you'll be patient, I'll have the criminal in a few minutes. I'll start with you, Mrs. Van Dyke.

MRS. VAN DYKE

What? *I*, his wife.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Ah, that surprises you, but I am the greatest detective in the world, and why—because, to me, no one is immune—every one is guilty until he is proven otherwise. That—my friends—is the secret of my success. This wife business doesn't mean a thing. (*Reads from book.*) Do you know that in the past decade, according to statistics, that 2,455 wives have murdered their husbands?

MRS. VAN DYKE

Good heavens, why?

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Mrs. Van Dyke, I don't like that innocent manner; it won't get you anywhere. I want to know why *you* murdered *your* husband.

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

MRS. VAN DYKE

Oh, why, I did not.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Just a minute, I got a good idea. We'll vote on it: the one who gets the most votes murdered Mr. Van Dyke; that's fair, isn't it? All who say Mrs. Van Dyke is guilty, say "Aye." (*All shout "Aye" and raise their hands.*) One, two, three, good! (*Marks it down.*) Next, Mr. Van Dyke, Jr.

VAN DYKE, JR.

Surely you don't think that I—why, my father and I were the best pals in the world.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Can't help it, that's my method. I'd be a fine sap of a police commissioner to let you walk out just because you are his son. (*Looks at book, again.*) Why, in the past decade, 1,467 sons have murdered their fathers, and earlier in the evening you were heard arguing very dramatically with your father. What was that about?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Oh, that was personal.

POLICE COMMISSIONER (*very domineering*)

Yes, yes, well—

VAN DYKE, JR.

Oh, that was too personal, commish.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Really, oh, well, never mind. How old are you?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Twenty-seven.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Where were you born?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Hackensack.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Where did you get that tie?

VAN DYKE, JR.

Macy's.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

How much?

VAN DYKE, JR.

One dollar.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Naw; oh, that's foolish! Let me tell you, there's the sweetest little tie shop in Yonkers you ever saw; in one of those funny buildings. It's in the back, six flights up. You go around a lot of curves and come to three hallways; you take the other one and go straight ahead.

VAN DYKE, JR.

Straight ahead, that's easy.

POLICE COMMISSIONER (*showing his tie*)

Why, look, only ninety-five cents; you can't beat that.

VAN DYKE, JR.

No, sir; you can't even tie it. How do you get there?

POLICE COMMISSIONER

It's already made, very convenient. You take the subway to 242nd Street and take a few cars, or you can take the train. It won't cost more than fifty cents. Or, better still, some day when you have nothing in particular to do, start out, say, six in the morning, take your lunch; you'll get there about noon; eat your lunch; take your time, you know; get your tie, and you'll be back for dinner.

VAN DYKE, JR.

That would be ideal.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

All those in favor of Mr. Van Dyke, Jr., being guilty? (*Applause.*) Carried. Now, Madame Bozo.

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

MADAME BOZO

Oh, sir, you know that I am innocent. I wouldn't kill a mosquito.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

That's a downright lie, and you know it. I still think you are Red Light Annie. (*Takes out his glass and inspects her neck, takes his finger and rubs her neck.*) Yes, you are Red Light Annie, from Pittsburgh. You can't tell me that isn't Pittsburgh dirt. I've been there too often for that. (*Sees his watch on her.*) Ah, this looks like my watch.

MADAME BOZO (*innocently*)

Oh, no, sir.

POLICE COMMISSIONER (*looks for his own*)

That's funny, mine is gone. It *must* be mine.

MADAME BOZO

Oh, no, sir!

POLICE COMMISSIONER

What are you doing with a man's watch?

MADAME BOZO

My brother gave it to me for my birthday. You ought to know, captain; I've told you often enough that I don't like ladies' watches. I always use a man's watch.

(*Starts to sob.*)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Wait a minute, wait a minute. I didn't say you stole it yet. (*Reads on it.*) "J. J." Why, that's my initials, it *is* my watch, you must think I am a fool.

MADAME BOZO

Oh, no, sir; no, sir. J. J. is *my* initials, too. Jennie Jones is my name.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Really. Jennie Jones, well, well. Are you related to *the* Joneses?

MADAME BOZO

Oh, yes, sir. He was my father, *Mr. Jones*.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Well, well, now that's different. (*Looks again.*) By Sir Galahad, that *is* my watch! (*Reads.*) "From the mayor to J. J." Why, this is the watch the mayor gave me for being the best detective in the world.

MADAME BOZO

Oh, no, sir; no, sir. You see, my brother went to the mayor to get his permission to give me the watch, being a man's watch, you see, and he thought, after he got his permission, that he ought to put the mayor's name on it. In thirty years it will be very valuable.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Well, that's funny, quite a coincidence, isn't it? All in favor of Madame Bozo being guilty? (*Applause.*) Ah, now we come to the real culprit. Rajah. (*Bells ring, lights go out.*) Stand still everybody, don't move, by the order of the Police Department. Lights up, please. Come on, lights up. Don't move anybody. (*Lights go up; he is all alone.*) Damn it. (*Draws his gun and goes after them; there is running in and out, shots and queer things happening. He is once more in room alone. He registers disgust. He blows whistle. They all come running in.*) Now look here, this isn't fair, no running away. I'm the greatest detective in the world and I haven't solved this mystery yet.

MRS. VAN DYKE

Oh, but don't be discouraged, Mr. Jones. Think of the Swatza murder; there have been two hundred policemen after that and they haven't found out anything yet. Look what you've done, you've found out where my son bought his tie. I mean to say, all those things help, they lead to a clue.

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Yes, I know I'm clever. I know it. But this has got to

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

be solved right away. Now everybody stay right here—

ALL

Oh, tell it to the judge!

(All run out—confusion again.)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

Darn it, now I'm sore, I'm sore! *(Whistles again. All enter.)* Now look here, I'm sore, that's all. I'm sore! I'll give you one more chance. The murderer is in this room and I'm going to get him, that's final.

(All shout "Hurrah" and applaud.)

MARY RILEY *(enters with a book. She is in her nightgown.)*

Say, what's all the noise about? I can't sleep. I can't even read.

POLICE COMMISSIONER *(taking her gently by arm)*

Little girl, you're too young and very innocent. I hate to tell you, but I fear I must. Something of great importance has happened. Mr. Van Dyke has been foully murdered. Now I must do my duty, so you run along to your room and don't bother us.

MARY RILEY

Is that all? Why didn't you say so? Good Lord, I could have been asleep all this time. Why, I murdered him.

(The others fall back in amazement.)

POLICE COMMISSIONER

You naughty girl, but why?

MARY RILEY

Why, he was positively rude to me. I mean to say, he can be rude to his wife, or to Madame Bozo, his companion of questionable character, but that stuff doesn't go with me.

POLICE COMMISSIONER *(shoots everybody but the girl. Puts his hand on her head)*

God bless you!

(Shoots himself.)

MARY RILEY *(sits down and reads)*

Thank God, I can read. *(Starts to read.)* "The Inner

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

self. Man's greatest enemy is himself. Man's greatest enemy is his own fear; his fear to do. Any one can become a successful Butcher, by faithful application and the will to do." Let me think, a butcher. I don't know. I don't think it's worth the bother.

(She shoots herself.)

CURTAIN

PIERROT'S MOTHER

A FANTASTIC PLAY

by GLENN HUGHES

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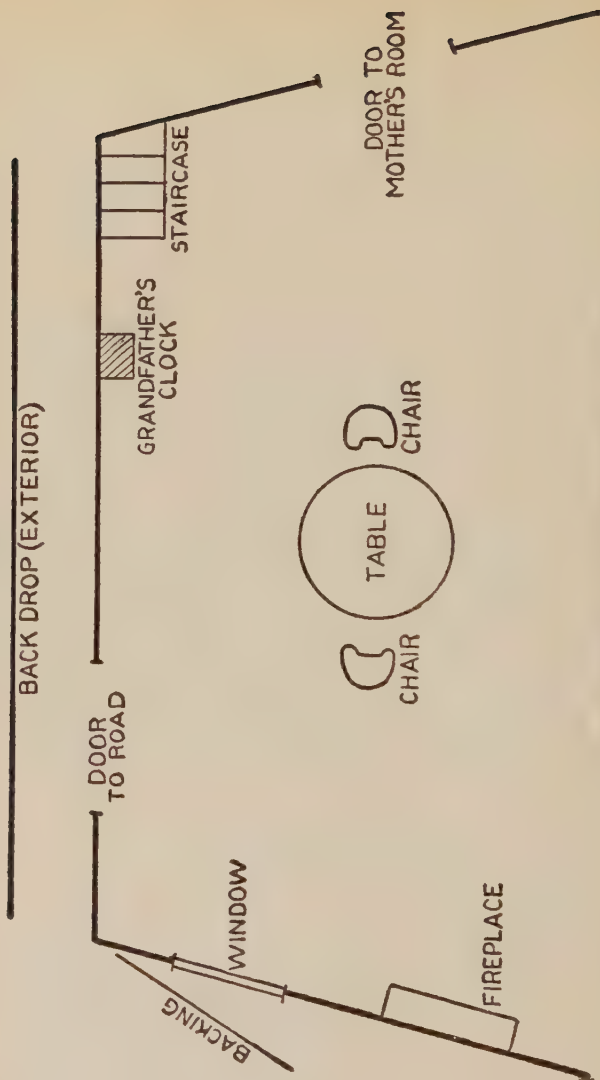
PIERROT'S MOTHER

It is extremely advantageous to the group whose equipment is limited that the quaintness and charm of Mr. Hughes' play can be best preserved by the use of a very simple setting. There must be an atmosphere of coziness and comfort to contrast with the bleakness felt when the door is opened. The light should appear to come from the fireplace and candles only, and any additional lighting employed should be covered with amber gelatine slides to make a mellow glow. The stairs should be a simple matter; instruct your stage carpenter to build three or four steps. These are placed in the upper left-hand corner of the stage and are sufficient to suggest a flight of stairs leading from the room. A touch of the unusual might be given by having the furniture slightly imaginative in design—enough to indicate that the Mother, too, had dreams and fancies. In a word, that she, too, was not commonplace. The costumes of Pierrot and Pierrette should be the traditional ones, at first so worn and bedraggled as to be almost unrecognizable. The violin and harp combinations would be the best for the off-stage music, but if this is impossible a haunting waltz on the Victrola may be played.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR THE MOTHER

Knitting
Spectacles



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "PIERROT'S MOTHER"

PIERROT'S MOTHER

CHARACTERS

PIERROT

PIERRETTE

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PLACE: *The living room in PIERROT'S old home*

TIME: *A winter evening*

The setting is a quaint, simply furnished living room in a cottage. Outer entrance at back, right of center. Inner entrances at left and at upper right. Staircase leading to upper rooms at back, extreme left. Table and chairs center. Clock beside the stairs. Fireplace lower right. Teakettle and teapot on the hearth. Lighted candles on the mantel and on a small stand at the foot of the stairs.

As the curtain rises, PIERROT'S MOTHER, who is a delightful old lady with white hair and a kind face, is discovered drawing the shades at the window, upper right. Presently she comes down to the fire, places the teakettle on the crane, and resumes her knitting, which she has shortly before laid aside. She rocks gently as she knits, and a sigh escapes her lips. In a moment, a timid rap sounds on the outer door. The old lady listens, removing her spectacles as she does so. The knock is repeated. Laying her knitting on the stool, she rises, crosses, and opens the door. The yellow light from the room penetrates sufficiently the darkness outside to reveal a rather pathetic figure standing on the step. It is a forlorn and slightly bedraggled PIERRETTE, who blinks once or twice in the face of the light, then speaks up as might a child who had lost her way.

PIERRETTE

Good evening, madam. I wondered if you would mind. . . .

MOTHER (*a bit bewildered*)

What is it? I can't see you. Come into the light.

PIERRETTE (*advancing gingerly*)

It is so dark and cold out, and this house looked so cozy and warm, that I just couldn't help knocking. I wondered if you would mind letting me come in and

MOTHER (*her heart expanding instantly*)

Why, you poor child! Let me shut the door or we'll freeze to death. Of course you are welcome to come in and warm yourself. But how does it happen you are wandering at this time of night? Haven't you any home?

PIERRETTE (*drooping sadly*)

Not any more.

MOTHER

What a pity! And haven't you any money, either?

PIERRETTE (*shaking her head*)

Not a penny.

MOTHER

Ah, the shame of it! So you were just walking about to keep from freezing?

PIERRETTE

Yes.

(*She starts to weep.*)

MOTHER (*putting her arms about her and leading her over to the fire*)

There, there, child! Never mind. Don't cry, sweetie. You'll feel better by and by. You can sit in the big chair and get all warm as toast. I'll have a cup of tea for you in a minute. The kettle is on already. See how nice it will be!

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERRETTE

I am so tired and so hungry! I have walked for miles and miles, and I didn't know where I was or what I would do.

MOTHER

But where did you come from?

PIERRETTE (*gulping*)

A place a long way from here.

MOTHER

So! And what was the name of the place?

PIERRETTE

I don't remember. I never paid much attention to the names of places we were in. I know what they looked like, and the kind of people that lived there, but that was all.

MOTHER (*busy preparing the tea*)

Then you have traveled a great deal?

PIERRETTE (*sighing*)

Oh, yes. We were never in one place for long, and sometimes we didn't stop at all for days and days.

MOTHER

But what were you doing, going about that way over the world?

PIERRETTE

Singing and dancing.

MOTHER

Oh!

PIERRETTE

Yes, we went singing and dancing over the world, teaching people how to be happy.

MOTHER

But you weren't always happy yourselves?

PIERRETTE

At first we were, before we got really acquainted. But finally. . . . Oh, how terrible it was! . . . I never supposed a person could be so miserable!

MOTHER

You poor girl. You must tell me all about it. Perhaps I can help you.

PIERRETTE

No, you could never help me. You don't understand how it is. It was all my own fault, and now it's too late to do anything.

MOTHER

Perhaps not. We never know when it's too late. Here, now, is your tea. Be careful, don't spill it—it's hot. And here's a cake to eat with it. It's ginger cake.

PIERRETTE

Oh, how good! I never *did* taste anything so good.

MOTHER

So you are a dancer.

PIERRETTE (*her mouth full of cake*)

Um-hum.

MOTHER

It must be a very hard life.

PIERRETTE (*swallowing her cake*)

It is, sometimes.

MOTHER

But you don't mind the hardships?

PIERRETTE

Of course not. There's a joy in it that makes up for everything else, except

MOTHER

Except what?

PIERRETTE

I can't tell you or I'll cry. (*She looks wistfully at the tea left in her cup.*) I can't cry and drink my tea at the same time.

PIERROT'S MOTHER

MOTHER

Then finish your tea. (*She smiles indulgently.*) And you must have another cake, too. They are such tiny things.

PIERRETTE

What a wonderfully kind person you are! I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't taken me in.

MOTHER

Don't think about that at all. But I can't understand how you happen to be alone. Where are the others who traveled with you?

PIERRETTE (*putting down her cup*)

We parted. We quarreled, and each one left the other.

MOTHER

There were only two of you?

PIERRETTE

No, but only two of us really counted.

MOTHER

And who was the other?

PIERRETTE

Pierrot.

MOTHER

Pierrot?

PIERRETTE

Yes, that is what I called him.

MOTHER

And your name is . . .?

PIERRETTE

Pierrette.

MOTHER

Pierrette?

PIERRETTE

Yes, that is what he called me.

MOTHER

So Pierrot and Pierrette had a falling out.

PIERRETTE

It was all my fault. You see, at first we were so dreadfully in love with each other that nothing ever disturbed us. We danced and sang, and pleased the people, and it didn't matter which of us got the most applause. We shared everything, and each of us thought the other was perfect. But later on, when we grew just a trifle tired of so much affection, we began to notice which of us the people liked best. I was vainer than Pierrot, and much prouder of my dancing than he was of his singing, so it hurt me most. I couldn't stand the thought of not being the favorite. So I began telling Pierrot that he would fail if it weren't for me. I laughed at his singing, and called it silly. For a long while he thought I didn't mean it. Then one day he lost his temper, and told me I was driving him mad, and that he couldn't stand it another instant. I was proud, and I didn't imagine he would really and truly want to leave me. But I *did so* want him to appreciate me!

MOTHER (*tenderly*)

What a sad mistake!

PIERRETTE

To want him to appreciate me?

MOTHER

No, no, child. What a mistake to try to force him into it! How young and inexperienced you are!

PIERRETTE

I know I did wrong, but what else could I have done?

MOTHER

Why, you should have played the part of mother to him. All men are boys at heart; and though they make love like heroes, and swagger before their sweethearts, underneath it all, they long for some one to comb their hair and kiss their hurt fingers. Did you do those things for Pierrot?

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERRETTE

Indeed not! He would have been furious.

MOTHER (*smiling*)

So he made you think. But the wisest mistress of any man is the one who pretends that he is her lover, but who knows that he is her little boy, whom she must humor and comfort.

PIERRETTE (*rising and moving away*)

I can't believe it. And besides, I don't want the love of any little boy. Pierrot was a man!

MOTHER

And you lost him.

PIERRETTE (*taken aback*)

But it was not on that account. I was to blame. . . . Oh, yes, I know that! . . . but it was because I was jealous and made fun of him.

MOTHER

I'm afraid you're wrong, Pierrette.

PIERRETTE

But he told me that was the reason. If only I hadn't been so vain!

MOTHER

That was only his excuse. He may not have known himself what the real reason was. We are all like that. We do things, then find an excuse for them afterwards.

PIERRETTE

I am so unhappy! I would give anything in the world if I had not lost Pierrot!

(*She sits on the floor by MOTHER.*)

MOTHER

And don't you suppose *he* is unhappy, too?

PIERRETTE (*shaking her head sadly*)

No! he wouldn't be. He is so jolly and light-hearted. He never has an unhappy moment.

MOTHER (*smiling*)

You are sure of that?

PIERRETTE

Oh yes, quite sure. I never saw him shed a tear all the time we were together.

MOTHER

That is because he didn't want you to see him. Men are that way, unless you teach them better.

PIERRETTE

Pierrot crying? I can't imagine it. If he only *had*! Then I could have cried with him, and we would have been happy.

MOTHER

He was afraid you would think him childish.

PIERRETTE

Perhaps you are right, after all. Maybe it was tenderness he wanted and didn't find in me. But it is so silly, and so old-fashioned.

MOTHER

Yes, old-fashioned. So is love, my dear.

PIERRETTE

If I could have another chance! If I could find Pierrot, and he would take me back, I'd make him love me forever!
(*She rises with a passionate gesture.*)

MOTHER

No doubt you will find him—unless he finds you first.

PIERRETTE

He wouldn't look for me. He's singing and dancing somewhere right now—I know it. And here I am. . . .
(*She weeps.*)

MOTHER (*rising and caressing her*)

Now then, don't lose any more time crying. That will never bring him back to you. The thing to do is to go to

PIERROT'S MOTHER

bed and sleep. Forget all about Pierrot until morning. Then you will be rested, and can plan how to find him.

PIERRETTE

Will you really let me sleep here in your house?

MOTHER

Did you think I would turn you out in the cold?

PIERRETTE

Some people would. Especially a wandering person like me.

MOTHER

Nonsense. The world isn't that bad, child. But come on. I'll put you upstairs in a great big bed with a feather mattress.

PIERRETTE (*smiling sleepily*)

Oh, a feather bed! I shall be so happy I shan't sleep a wink.

MOTHER

No fear of that. Your eyes are half shut already. And the tea will help you into dreamland.

PIERRETTE (*yawning*)

The tea did make me . . . drowsy . . . I guess. . . .

MOTHER (*taking a lighted candle from the table at the foot of the stairs, and leading the way*)

Come on, dear. Be careful not to trip on the stairs. They're very steep.

PIERRETTE (*following*)

I'm coming. Oh, I'm so tired, I can hardly get to the top.

MOTHER (*as she disappears at the top of the stairs*)

Here is your room, Pierrette.

(*They are both out of sight. The fire crackles and the kettle sings. In a moment there is a sound outside. Feet scrape on the doorstep, then the latch is lifted, and the door slowly opens. PIERROT's head appears. He looks round the room, sees no one, opens the door further and finally*

steps all the way in, tiptoeing cautiously. His clothes are soiled and ragged; there are a few daubs of make-up on his face. His eyes are haggard, and his mouth droops pathetically. He crosses to the fire and sinks dejectedly in a chair. MOTHER appears at the top of the stairs, and comes down quietly. PIERROT does not hear her, nor does she see him. She is smiling happily, and stops to fasten the latch on the outer door. This startles PIERROT, who turns, rises and speaks.)

PIERROT (*in a broken voice*)

Mother! Don't you know me, mother?

MOTHER (*starting, then gazing in wonder at him*)

You . . . is it . . . ?

PIERROT (*going toward her*)

Of course it is! And you don't know me? I know it's been a long time, and I've changed some. But I'm still your own son, mumsy!

MOTHER (*reaching out her arms, with a joyous light of recognition in her face*)

Peter!

PIERROT (*embracing her tenderly*)

Dear mumsy! Did you think I was never coming back?

MOTHER

I was beginning to fear that, Peter.

PIERROT (*releasing himself*)

What a fool I was to stay away so long, when I had such a wonderful mother waiting here for me.

MOTHER (*looking him over*)

Where in the world did you get those awful clothes? And your face—it's all smeared with paint. What a sight you are!

PIERROT (*with a forlorn smile*)

I'm down and out, mumsy. I was a gay bird once, but my

PIERROT'S MOTHER

feathers are drooping now. I'll tell you all about it later, when I have had something to eat.

(He looks hungrily at the tea things.)

MOTHER *(bustling over to the fireplace)*

Of course! Why didn't I think of that at once? You must be starved! And it is such a terrible night! How did you come?

PIERROT *(flatly)*

On foot.

MOTHER

What a pity! Weren't you nearly frozen?

PIERROT

I was, but I shall thaw out presently. Hurry the tea, though, won't you, mumsy dear? I shan't last many more minutes. Ah, here are some ginger cakes! I haven't had any for ages. Do you remember the last time I ate ginger cakes here?

(He takes a whole one at a single bite.)

MOTHER *(as she takes the kettle off the fire)*

It was the day you left, Peter. I thought you would never have enough of them. *

PIERROT

And I filled my pockets to boot. Lord, but they were good! And here I am, in the same spot, with the same dear mother, eating the same wonderful ginger cakes!

MOTHER *(happily)*

Here. Come sit down in this easy chair, and I'll give you your tea. There is a cushion for your head, and a stool for your feet. *(She arranges everything for him as she talks.)* Why, your shoes are worn clear through. How careless you have been!

PIERROT

That's nothing. I'm worn through myself. I'm a ghost, mumsy, nothing better than a ghost. *(He sips his tea.)*

Oh, how perfectly lovely! I haven't had such tea in years and years.

MOTHER

Poor, poor Peter! What a terrible time you must have had. What *have* you been doing all the time you were away? You never wrote to me. It almost broke my heart. How could you be so cruel, when you knew that I would be worried to death over you?

(Her voice trembles. She sinks in a chair beside him, and watches his face anxiously.)

PIERROT (*soberly*)

I should have written to you, mumsy, but . . . but . . . I wanted to wait until I could come home with a bag of gold and surprise you. I tried so hard to make myself a wonderful person so that I should have riches and fame. And every day I thought I should strike it the next. So it went. I put off sending you word, and finally I was ashamed to . . . ashamed. . . .

MOTHER

Oh, Peter! And you didn't have any one to comfort you?

PIERROT

No; I . . . but that doesn't matter. I wanted to be brave. I wouldn't have asked for sympathy if I had been *dying*! I was all right, for a while . . . and I was happy much of the time, until . . . until later.

(He sighs and sips his tea.)

MOTHER

But what were you doing all the time, Peter, to make a living?

PIERROT

Playing the fool.

MOTHER (*shocked*)

The fool! Oh, what do you mean?

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERROT

That is the only sure way to become rich, mumsy.

MOTHER

You're joking now.

PIERROT

That's right. Ask any one who knows the ways of the world.

MOTHER

Then how is it that you didn't make your fortune?

PIERROT

I made such a poor fool. It's an art, you know—an art of the highest sort; and one has to be profoundly clever to make a go of it. I took the whole business too lightly.

MOTHER

You're as full of nonsense as ever. I thought you would be grown up by now.

PIERROT

So I am. I'm older, and very much sadder.

MOTHER

But you mustn't be sadder. We must keep cheerful in spite of everything.

PIERROT (*sighing and taking the last ginger cake*)

That is *so* easy to say.

MOTHER

But if you lose hope, what have you left?

PIERROT (*holding up the cake*)

Ginger cakes.

MOTHER (*laughing at his foolishness*)

Not even ginger cakes are left when you're around, you rascal. To-morrow I shall have to bake up a whole new batch of them.

PIERROT (*eating*)

Please do, mumsy. I can't live without them.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

MOTHER

You shall have anything that will make you happy.

PIERROT (*rising and moving away*)

No. That can't be. I've lost my happiness.

MOTHER

How absurd! You have lots of time yet to make a success in the world.

PIERROT (*seriously*)

Oh, it isn't success I am worrying about. I got over that long ago.

MOTHER

Then what *does* worry you?

PIERROT (*turning to the fire and becoming very sad*)

If I tell you, mumsy, you'll think me silly.

MOTHER (*laying a hand on his arm*)

Of course I won't. I'm your mother, Peter. What is it? You know I'll understand.

PIERROT (*swallowing a lump in his throat and beginning softly*)

Well, it's a long story, and I can't even remember it all. But—I fell in love with a beautiful, dainty, sweet child of a girl. I found her in a garden a long, long way from here. She had grown up there like a flower within four walls, knowing nothing but sunlight and tender care. The only love she had ever learned was that which sang in her own heart. Then I came along one day, climbed the wall to pick a posy, and found her hiding there away from the world like a violet in a cranny. I sang her one of my prettiest songs, and she loved me for it. We climbed the wall together, and slipped away down the road, hand in hand and heart in heart, dancing and singing toward the land where nothing matters except love. (*He pauses for an instant and closes his eyes. Then he goes on.*) She learned my tricks, and others besides. We were a clever couple, and kept the people laughing. Before long some other dancers

joined us, and we traveled on together. What a merry lot we were! It never occurred to us that there could be an end to all our fun. We loved each other, and that was all we knew. But finally things changed. Our love grew stale. It got to be an old, old story, and neither of us tried to make it new again. I could have done it, but my pride wouldn't let me. If I had only gone to her and asked her to forgive me! If I had got down on my knees and told her how stupid I had been! Instead of that, I always slipped away where I could cry a bit, and she couldn't see me. Then I would be cross with her, and pretend it didn't matter what she thought of me. This made her hate me worse than ever. I know she despised me. She told me so time and again. And I was too proud to let her see that my heart was almost broken for a little pity.

MOTHER (*going to him, and slipping an arm around his shoulder*)

Poor Peter-boy! You have suffered, haven't you?

PIERROT

And now I have lost her forever!

(*He buries his head in his hands.*)

MOTHER

How do you know? She may be looking for you, and wanting you.

PIERROT

No! No! I killed all the love she ever felt for me. She was glad when she went away. She is probably now somewhere—dancing happily as ever, while I . . . I . . .

MOTHER

What was her name, Peter?

PIERROT

It was Pierrette.

MOTHER (*smiling happily to herself*)

Pierrette? What a sweet name! And did she call you "Peter"?

PIERROT

No; she called me "Pierrot."

MOTHER

Pierrot! It is much like Peter, and it suits you better.

PIERROT

I shall never hear ~~that~~ name again.

MOTHER

Don't be so hopeless. You may find her after all. But just now, Peter, you had better go to bed. You will feel much happier in the morning, when you have had a good sleep.

PIERROT (*lifting his forlorn face*)

You are right, mumsy. I need to get some sleep. I am so tired.

MOTHER

Come, then. It is getting later all the time.

PIERROT

Shall I sleep in my old bed upstairs?

MOTHER

No, Peter. That isn't ready for you. You can sleep in here to-night.

(*She takes a candle from the mantel and leads the way to the door at the left.*)

PIERROT

But that's your room!

MOTHER

Never mind. I'll be all right. You do as I tell you.

PIERROT (*yawning*)

Whatever you say, mumsy. Oh, I's so sleepy!

(*He follows her.*)

MOTHER (*opening the door for him*)

There you are. Everything's ready for you. Good night, Peter.

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERROT (*from within*)

Good night, mumsy.

(She closes the door after him, and stands for a moment looking at it. Then she returns to the fire, pokes up the red coals, sits in the easy chair, and resumes her knitting. She begins to nod. The fire burns low so that the light casts shadows. She falls asleep.)

Suddenly from somewhere, evidently outside the house, comes a strain of captivating music. It begins softly, far off, then draws nearer, until it fills the room with melody. The air becomes enchanted. There is no sound other than the music.

A white figure appears at the head of the stairs. It is PIERRETTE, transformed. She is a vision of freshness and daintiness. Her ear is strained to catch the music, and she runs lightly halfway down the stairs, where she stays, poised on tip-toe.

The door at the left opens, and PIERROT's head appears. Then he comes out into full view. He, too, is transformed. His rags are discarded, and he is all white and ruffled. He sees PIERRETTE at the same moment that she turns and sees him. They start in astonishment.)

PIERROT (*in a surprised whisper*)

Pierrette!

PIERRETTE (*echoing his tone*)

Pierrot!

(The music continues, but is more subdued. PIERROT runs to the foot of the staircase and looks up at PIERRETTE enraptured.)

PIERROT

Were you calling me?

PIERRETTE

I thought you were calling me.

PIERROT

It must have been your voice I heard just now.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

PIERRETTE

I was dreaming, and your voice awakened me.

PIERROT

Come down, sweetheart. I have been seeking you so long!

PIERRETTE

Oh, Pierrot! And I have been seeking you!

PIERROT

Come down, sweetheart!

PIERRETTE

Sh-h-h!

(She puts her finger to her lips and runs lightly down into his arms.)

PIERROT

Where have you been since you left me?

PIERRETTE

I have been everywhere, looking for you. But it was *you*, remember, who left *me*.

PIERROT

Was it? I thought it was you.

PIERRETTE

We were both mistaken. We each went away.

PIERROT

And now we have each come back.

PIERRETTE

We will forget that we were ever parted.

PIERROT

Then you love me still?

PIERRETTE

Much more than before.

PIERROT

And so do I love you, much more than before.

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERRETTE

Why?

PIERROT

Because I lost you.

PIERRETTE

That isn't my reason.

PIERROT

What is yours?

PIERRETTE

Because I found you.

PIERROT

It's all the same: lost, found; found, lost. It's the finding and losing that keeps love strong.

PIERRETTE

How did you happen to come here?

PIERROT

This used to be my home.

PIERRETTE (*starting away from him*)

Your home? Then she

PIERROT (*nodding toward the sleeping figure*)

Is my mother.

PIERRETTE

Oh! and I didn't know it, Pierrot!

(*The music has stopped. They look at the MOTHER.*)

PIERROT

She is such a dear mother, and I have been so unkind to her! (*Suddenly.*) Shall we stay here with her, Pierrette?

PIERRETTE

Live here forever?

PIERROT

Yes, with my mother. Live here where everything is quiet, and there is no cruelty or foolishness.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

PIERRETTE

She would be so good to us, and we could take care of her.
And in the evenings we could all sit by the fire

PIERROT

With the teakettle singing beside us

PIERRETTE

And lots of ginger cakes

PIERROT

Yes, heavenly ginger cakes!

PIERRETTE

And warm feather beds to sleep in!

PIERROT

Shall we stay, Pierrette?

(He takes her hand appealingly, and they smile happily at each other. But the music begins again. It is tantalizing, bewitching. It teases and lures their fancies out and beyond this peace and serenity. Their eyes sparkle, and their bodies begin to sway to the rhythm.)

PIERRETTE *(dancing over to the left)*

Do you remember a long road, winding over a hill to a city, where tiny yellow lights wink in the twilight?

PIERROT *(following her, and catching her tone)*

Do you remember a palace by the seashore, where music rose from silk pavilions, and swept over the water in the moonlight?

PIERRETTE *(with increasing swiftness and emotion)*

I remember a million sparkling faces on a great street in the sunshine, where all the colors met and moved against each other!

PIERROT *(excitedly)*

I remember a roar of great delight from a thousand thousand voices, when blue and yellow rockets shot upward in the darkness!

(The music grows faster and louder. It becomes jubilant.)

PIERROT'S MOTHER

PIERRETTE

And how I whirled, and whirled, and whirled, until the sky seemed to be falling . . . falling

PIERROT

And how I sang until my soul flew out to meet the stars, that danced and danced. . . .

PIERRETTE

Pierrot! It's calling now!

PIERROT (*ecstatically*)

It's calling. Yes, Pierrette! And we are answering!

(He sweeps her up into his arms, and runs to the outer door. Lifting the latch, he pulls the door open, and sets her down. They hesitate a moment, and look back at the MOTHER, who is sleeping quietly. PIERROT runs back to her and kisses her hair with a swift, light gesture. He returns to the doorway, and PIERRETTE skips down to the MOTHER, imitating PIERROT's kiss. Then she flies back to PIERROT's arms. The music is dying away in the distance.)

PIERROT (*with an affectionate gesture*)

Good-by, home!

PIERRETTE

Good-by, feather bed!

PIERROT

Good-by, ginger cakes!

(He pushes the door shut with a sudden movement, and they are outside. All lights off on the stage.)

QUICK CURTAIN

THE GHOST STORY

A COMEDY FOR PERSONS OF NO GREAT AGE

by BOOTH TARKINGTON

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THE GHOST STORY

Perhaps the best advice to give the players in presenting one of Mr. Tarkington's plays of youth is merely to enjoy themselves. There are no mechanical or scenic difficulties in the production of this capital comedy. The more thoroughly the cast enters into the spirit of it, particularly the ghost-story scene, and forgets that it is acting, the better the result will be. The ensemble scenes will require the most rehearsing. They must be natural and fluent, with plenty of life and action, but at the same time each speech must be clean cut. In the scene where George tells the story it might be well to have several of the young people form a group on the floor about the feet of the narrator. The comments of the listeners must be carefully rehearsed to make sure that they do not interfere with the relation of the story itself. The comedy in the character of George will be heightened if the player delivers his lines with great earnestness.

PROPERTY LIST

FOR ANNA

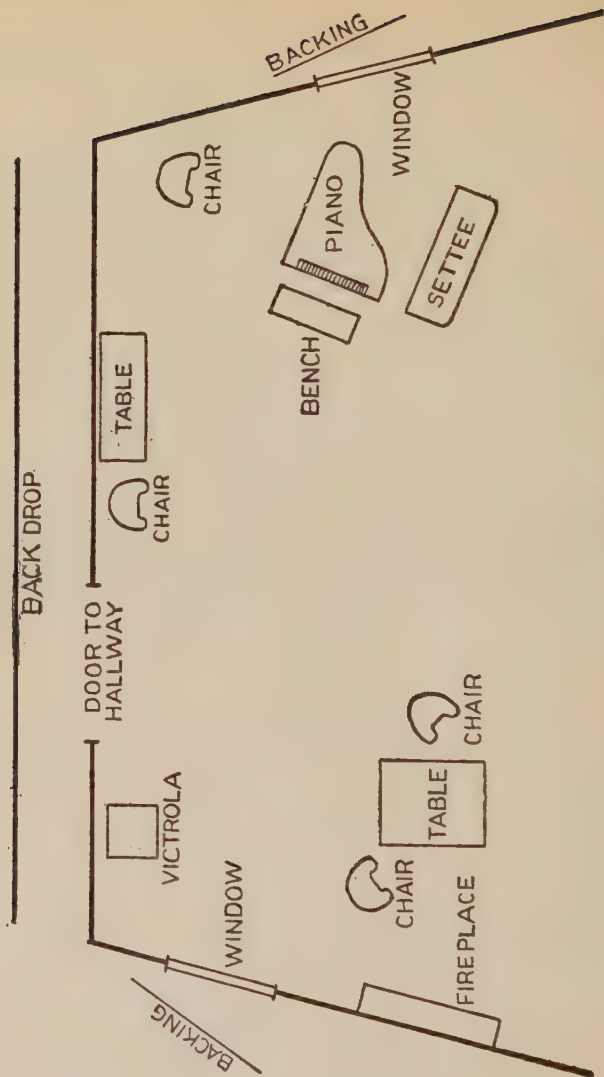
Leather-bound book

FOR FRED

Glass of water

FOR GEORGE

Camper's pocketknife



THE SCENE PLOT FOR "THE GHOST STORY"

THE GHOST STORY

CHARACTERS

GEORGE, an earnest young gentleman of 22

ANNA, a pretty, young girl of 20

MARY

GRACE

LENNIE

TOM

FLOYD

LYNN

FRED

HOUSEMAID

} Three girls of 19 or 20

} Four youths of about the same age

The rise of the curtain discloses a comfortable and pleasant living room of commonplace type. It is early evening; a clock on the mantelpiece marks the time as twenty minutes after seven; the lamps are lit. At a piano is seated a pretty girl of twenty; she plays dance music gayly for a few moments; then abruptly her theme becomes sentimental and she plays a love song, singing bits of it to herself, while her expression becomes tender and wistful.

An electric bell is heard, and upon this sound she stops singing and playing at once; her look is alert. She considers the room thoughtfully, then goes to a chair beside a little table, picks up a small leather-bound book, sits and pretends to read with dreamy absorption. Then, behind her, across the room, a door is opened, offering a glimpse of a hallway, where a nervous and earnest young gentleman of twenty-two is hastily concluding the removal of his heavy overcoat and gloves, with the connivance of a

NOTE.—Upon the program it should be mentioned that the curtain will be lowered for a moment during the progress of the play to denote a lapse of about half an hour.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

HOUSEMAID. *He comes into the living room immediately. With an air of complete surprise the girl looks up from her pretended reading.*

THE GIRL

Why, George—
(*She rises.*)

GEORGE (*as the HOUSEMAID closes the door*)

Anna, I came early because—

ANNA (*as they shake hands and sit*)

I'm so flattered. I didn't dream you'd do more than just call me up to say good-by.

GEORGE

You didn't think I'd come myself?

ANNA

Why, no. I didn't think you'd have time; you have to make good-by calls on all your aunts and married sisters and cousins, don't you? I'm really very much flattered.

GEORGE

I came early, as soon as I could choke down dinner and run, because—well, I wanted to talk to you alone for a few minutes for a novelty. I thought maybe just this once I could get here before the rest of 'em pile in.

ANNA

"The rest of 'em?" I don't *know* that any of 'em will "pile in" this evening, George.

GEORGE

No, you never do; but they pile in, just the same. That's the trouble with you, Anna; you're too popular. (*She laughs protestingly. He goes on earnestly.*) Oh, yes, you are. It's horrible!

ANNA

What nonsense!

GEORGE

It's the truth; it's just horrible for a girl to be like you.

THE GHOST STORY

ANNA

Thanks!

GEORGE (*emphatically*)

It is. Nobody can ever get within a mile of you. And what I hate about it is that girls hang around you just as much as the rest of us do.

ANNA (*demurely*)

You think it's queer that girls like me, George?

GEORGE

It isn't "queer," no. (*Adds in a burst of confidence.*) But it's been pretty painful to me these holidays.

ANNA (*staring*)

What *are* you talking about?

GEORGE

Well, that's what I came early to tell you.

ANNA

You came early to tell me what you're talking about?

GEORGE (*a little confused*)

What I mean to say—listen; it's just this: I—I—I—

ANNA (*reminding him*)

You began by saying it's horrible that anybody seems able to stand me.

GEORGE

It's horrible that I always have to see you in a crowd; that's what I mean. If there aren't four or five men around you, then there are four or five girls; and if there aren't just four or five girls, or four or five men, then there are four or five of both of 'em.

ANNA

But look, George. Look under the piano, and under the chairs, and under—

GEORGE

What for?

ANNA

For all those people you said were always around me. It's queer, but you do seem to me to be the only one here.

GEORGE

Yes, just this minute. But you know as well as I do that pretty soon the bell will begin ringing, and they'll come pouring in. Then whey they're here they stay and stay and stay and— Why, it *is* horrible!

ANNA

Aren't you a funny boy!

GEORGE

I wish I could see any fun in it! (*He rises and paces the floor as he talks.*) Why, I believe if I'd known it was going to be like this I wouldn't have come home for the holidays. You don't know how I looked forward to coming home and—and seeing you! Why, I've hardly thought of anything else, all the fall term!

ANNA (*incredulously*)

You don't mean you thought of it during the football season?

GEORGE

No. I mean yes. Yes, I was looking forward to it even then, too. I kept thinking: "Just wait till the Christmas holidays come; then I'll get to see a whole lot of Anna. I'll get to dance with her a lot, to take her to a lot of things—maybe, even, I'll get some evenings alone with her by the fire, and we'll read some poetry or something together." That's what I thought! (*He laughs bitterly.*) And look what's happened! You were booked up *solid* for every last little thing a person could hope to take you to! I've never got once clear around with you a single time you've danced with me—some frenzied bird always cut in—and every afternoon or evening I've found you at home I've got to sit about seventeen rows back and just be audience for the bickering that went on. And now it's my last evening; my train leaves at nine-fifty-one, and I

THE GHOST STORY

won't see you again till June, after commencement; and I know I'm not going to get a chance to talk to you five minutes! Some of these birds'll be breaking in here any second. That's why it's horrible!

ANNA

But they haven't broken in yet, George.

GEORGE

Yes, but they will!

ANNA (*shyly*)

Well, but if you—if you *do* like being alone with me, why don't you—well, why don't you just like it until they do come?

GEORGE

"Like it?" You don't seem to realize my train is the ninety-five, and I'll have to leave here at least half an hour before then; and I'll have to say good-by to you with people around, so I *can't* say what I want to!

ANNA

But what is it you want to say to me—except just good-by?

GEORGE

Well, it's something I couldn't say with people around.

ANNA (*nervously*)

But—but there aren't any people around now, George.

GEORGE (*shaking his head gloomily*)

Oh, there would be, before I could say it! I know 'em!

ANNA (*noncommittal*)

Well—

GEORGE (*taking a chair near her suddenly*)

Anna, it's just this. I want you to understand the position I'm in. I want you to understand what I—what I have in mind. (*Breaking off abruptly in a tone of abysmal despair.*) But what's the use? Some of 'em are *sure* to come in. Couldn't you send word you're not at home?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

ANNA

Well, you see, Lennie Cole and Tom Bannister and Mary and Grace and Fred—

GEORGE

I knew it! And you said you didn't know they'd be piling in!

ANNA

I don't—not precisely, that is. But—but, of course it's possible. And they'd certainly know it wasn't so if I sent word "not at home," and they'd feel hurt.

GEORGE (*despairingly*)

That's it! That's my regular luck with you! Isn't there *any* way to get rid of 'em?

ANNA (*seemingly reproachful*)

They *are* friends of mine, you know, George.

GEORGE (*despondently*)

Pardon me.

ANNA

Very well.

GEORGE

Listen. What I was saying—

ANNA (*quickly*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*speaking hurriedly*)

I wanted to tell you, I have been looking forward to the holidays because I thought this would be the time I'd be—ah—justified, as it were, in saying something I—something I had in mind to say to you.

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I've had it in my mind to say ever since—well, for quite a time—ever since—ever since—

THE GHOST STORY

ANNA

Is it something about your studies, George?

GEORGE

No, it certainly isn't. It's about—well, I've wanted to say it—ah—a long time.

ANNA

How long?

GEORGE

Ever since—well, it was that day you wore a blue dress.

ANNA

What sort of a blue dress?

GEORGE

I don't know. It was—it was blue.

ANNA

With flounces? And lace on the blouse?

GEORGE

I don't know. It was just—sort of blue.

ANNA

But I haven't had a blue dress this year.

GEORGE

No. It wasn't this year.

ANNA

Why, the last time I wore a blue dress was that summer at the lake, three years ago.

GEORGE

Yes. That was when it was. You wore it the day we went canoeing for water lilies. That was the day it happened.

ANNA

The day what happened?

GEORGE

The day you wore the blue dress.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

ANNA

Oh, yes.

GEORGE

Yes. It was then.

(Both of them are very serious.)

ANNA

Yes. That one was blue linen, and very simple. It was another one that had flounces—with lace on the blouse.

GEORGE

Well—ever since then I've thought that some day I might feel that I was in a—well, in a position to—to justify—ah—what I'd like to say. You see, I—well, I was pretty young then; we both were, in fact.

ANNA

Yes, I suppose we were.

GEORGE

Yes. I suppose I hardly realized how young I was at the time. Funny, isn't it? I thought I was a real grown-up man of the world, and I was only nineteen! Looking back on it over these years a person sees how much he had still to learn! My goodness! When I think of all I've been through since then—

ANNA

You mean at college?

GEORGE

Yes, and here at home, too—like what I've been through these holidays, for instance.

ANNA

Have you? Why, I thought you looked so well, George.

GEORGE

I mean not getting near you. You know. What I was talking about.

ANNA

But that couldn't be very severe, George.

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE

Yes, it could, because it was. Anna, my father stopped off a day to see me at college in October—

ANNA

How nice!

GEORGE

We had a pretty serious talk about my future.

ANNA

Oh, I'm sorry it was serious, George.

GEORGE

What I mean—it was businesslike. About my future in business.

ANNA (*somewhat vaguely*)

Oh, yes.

GEORGE

Next June, when I get home, he's going to take me right in with him. He thinks—well, he thinks I'll get along all right. He—he's going to give me a ten per cent interest in the business, Anna.

ANNA

How lovely!

GEORGE (*swallowing*)

So that's—that's why I said I feel—ah—justified—in saying what I want to get a chance to—to say to you, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

What I mean—I mean that's why I'm sure to have sufficient means to—to settle down, as it were—and so I—I thought—I—

ANNA

Yes, George?

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

GEORGE

You see, that day you wore the blue dress I was only nineteen, and I hadn't had this talk with my father, because, in fact, I never did have this talk with him until just this October—as it were—and so—and so—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*solemn but increasingly nervous*)

And so—well, the time has come—the time has come—

ANNA (*glancing over her shoulder at the hall door*)

The time has come? Yes, George?

GEORGE

The time has come when I—when I want to ask you if—if—if—the time has come—it's come—it's come—

ANNA

Yes, George?

(*The bell rings loudly.*)

GEORGE (*leaping to his feet*)

I knew it! I knew they'd come piling in here just the instant I— (*He turns up stage, clasping his brow.*) Oh, my heavens! I knew it!

ANNA

Oh!

(*The door into the hall is opened by the HOUSEMAID, and two girls of nineteen or twenty are revealed, divesting themselves of outer wraps. They at once come hurrying gayly down to ANNA, greeting her with a jumble of words and laughter, to which she contributes in like manner, as they exclaim: "We just thought we'd frolic over to see you, old thing," and "Nothing doing at our house, so we thought we'd see if you knew anything." ANNA responds simultaneously, "Just lovely of you! We were just hoping you'd take it into your heads to drop in. How nice of you!" and so forth. The newcomers greet GEORGE with "Hello, George."*)

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE (*responds pessimistically*)

Howdy-do, Mary. Howdy-do, Grace.

ANNA

George just dropped in to say good-by.

MARY

Gracious! Hope we're not interfering.

GEORGE (*feebly*)

Oh, no. Not at all!

ANNA (*laughing*)

Why, of course not!

(*The bell rings.*)

GEORGE

Oh, my goodness! Here's some more!

GRACE (*reproachfully*)

College English, George? Don't they teach you to say "Here are more"?

GEORGE (*with gloomy absent-mindedness*)

Yes, there certainly are! I knew it!

(*The hall door opens to admit five more lively young people: a girl and four youths. The girl's name—it appears during the ensuing greetings—is LENNIE, and the young gentlemen are known to those present as TOM, FLOYD, LYNN, and FRED. They chatter phrases and half sentences of greeting all together for a few moments, though GEORGE takes only a pessimistic and fragmentary part in the ceremonies; then LENNIE shouts louder than any of the others and obtains a hearing.*)

LENNIE

But what are we going to do? We aren't just going to sit around and talk, are we?

MARY

Let's all go somewhere.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

SEVERAL OF THE OTHERS

Well, where? Where is there to go? Where do you want to go?

LENNIE

Well, most anywhere.

GEORGE

That's a sensible idea.

MARY

Where do you say to go, Anna?

ANNA

I? Oh, nowhere. I thought I wouldn't go out to-night.

GRACE

All right, then; we'll stay here.

CHORUS

Well, why not? Might as well be here as anywhere. Yes, let's take it easy for one night.

(And so forth.)

LENNIE

Well, what's the matter with our shaking the hoof a while? Turn on that phonograph, somebody.

(She grasps the youth FLOYD.)

CHORUS

That's it! Come on, then! We can dance here's well's anywhere! Tune her up, George!

(They prepare to dance; ANNA is seized upon, and, in the pairing of couples, the gloomy GEORGE finds himself the odd person, excluded.)

CHORUS

Start the instrument, George! George, you're the band! Why don't you tune up, George?

(GEORGE starts the phonograph, which stands in a corner of the room. The others dance, chattering. GEORGE goes to the fireplace and compares his watch with the clock on

THE GHOST STORY

the mantel shelf. Then he produces a camper's pocket-knife, opens out of it a small screwdriver, and returns to the phonograph with an air of determination. Glancing over his shoulder and assuring himself that the dancers are too busy to observe him, he busily sets to work upon the mechanism of the phonograph. Meanwhile the others begin to sing loudly and gayly the air played by the record, all oblivious of GEORGE's energetic destructiveness. The record falters; then it begins to make peculiar sounds.)

CHORUS (*not pausing in the dance*)

Why, gracious! What's the matter with the music? Is that instrument sick? Sounds like cholera morbus!

(*And so forth.*)

FLOYD (*shouting*)

Put on another record, George. What's the matter with the thing, anyhow?

GEORGE (*moving hastily away from the phonograph*)

I don't know. Is something wrong?

CHORUS

Can't you fix it? Put on another record! Do something!

GEORGE

Well, I'll see.

(*He puts a hand under the lid of the phonograph; there is instantly a clatter, and the music stops. So do the dancers.*)

CHORUS

What is the matter? Why don't you fix it? Why don't you—

GEORGE

Something seems to be the matter with it.

GRACE

Well, hurry and fix it.

GEORGE

I don't believe I—

LYNN (*looking under the lid*)

Well, no; I don't believe you could! (*He takes from under the lid the metal arm and detached sound box of the instrument.*) Why, it would take Edison himself to put this phonograph together again—it's all fallen apart!

CHORUS

Goodness! Why, just look at it! Well, of all the disappointing— Oh, my, how silly of it!

(*And so forth.*)

TOM

That's all the dancing you'll do to-night, ladies!

MARY

But you're men. Why don't some of you fix it?

LYNN (*singing*)

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall—"

GRACE

Oh, do hush. Why don't you fix it?

FLOYD and LYNN (*singing together*)

"All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again!"

(*They execute a few clog steps by way of conclusion.*)

MARY (*sinking into a chair*)

How tiresome!

FLOYD and LYNN

Thanks, lady!

GRACE (*sitting*)

Well, what are we going to do?

FRED

Let's play Button, Button! Who's Got the Button?

LENNIE (*sitting*)

Do hush!

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE (*earnestly*)

Well, I can't think of any way you could amuse yourselves. Strikes me this would be a great night for everybody to go home and get some sleep.

TOM

I thought you had to start back to college to-night.

GEORGE

I do. I meant everybody else.

TOM

What's the matter with you, George? I mean with your mind.

GEORGE

Nothing. I only meant—

GRACE

Oh, do hush! Can't anybody think of something we could do?

GEORGE

No. Not a thing.

MARY

We could play charades.

GEORGE

Charades? They're terrible.

GRACE (*with a shrug*)

Well, let's just sit around and talk, then.

GEORGE

Oh, murder, no!

ANNA

Well, what do you want to do, George?

GEORGE (*hastily*)

Well, I want to— (*He checks himself.*) I was just trying to think. It does seem a great night to go home and sleep.

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

FLOYD (*finishing a consultation with FRED*)

Why, of course. We've got enough for two tables, with George left over. He has to go pretty soon, anyhow, so he needn't play.

GEORGE (*uneasily*)

I needn't play what?

FLOYD (*smilingly*)

Bridge. We've got just enough for two tables without you.

CHORUS

That's it! Of course! Bridge! We'll play bridge till midnight. That's splendid!

(*And so forth. As they chatter they begin to clear two tables for cards.*)

GEORGE

No! For heaven's sake—

CHORUS

Anna, where are the cards? Get some counters and pencils. Who's going to be my partner? Who's going to be mine?

GEORGE (*shouting*)

No! Stop it! My goodness! Don't you ever get tired of doing the same thing night after night? Just because you can't dance you don't have to play bridge, do you? Stop it!

(*He is so vehement that he commands their attention; they pause in arrested attitudes.*)

FLOYD

Well, what's your idea? What do you think we'll like better?

GEORGE (*desperately*)

Well, let's—let's—let's—I'll tell you what let's do: let's tell ghost stories.

THE GHOST STORY

CHORUS (*dismally*)

Oh, my! Why, how silly! Of all the foolish—
(*And so forth. They turn to the tables again.*)

GEORGE

Wait! I'll tell you a ghost story. I'll show you if it's silly or not! I'll tell you a ghost story that the first time it was told in college everybody got so nervous that—well, some of 'em couldn't stand it.

FRED

What did they do?

GEORGE

Well, they—they got so nervous they—they—

FLOYD (*skeptically*)

Had to go right home to bed, did they?

GEORGE

Well, never mind. Let's see what you do.

MARY

I'd like to hear the ghost story that would make me nervous!

ANNA

Let's see if he can. Shall we all sit down, George?

GEORGE

Yes; all of you please sit down. (*They take chairs, smiling to one another and whispering skeptically as he goes on.*) And we don't want so much light; just this lamp'll do. I'll make it dimmer. (*He ties his handkerchief about the bulb of a lamp on a table.*) The way to feel a story like this is to think about it almost in the dark.

(*He shuts off the other lights at a switch upon the wall, leaving only the vague illumination of the dimmed lamp on the table.*)

THE APPLETON BOOK OF SHORT PLAYS

CHORUS (*incredulous, satirical, and giggling*)

Goodness, ain't it creepy! Why, George, how can you be so dramatic? How turrabill! Oh, Georgie, Georgie!

(*And so forth.*)

GEORGE (*assuming a husky voice*)

Listen, I tell you.

(*He stands by the dimmed lamp so that his face is vaguely seen above the triangular patch of light made by the lamp shade.*)

FLOYD

Well, go on. We're listening.

GEORGE (*impressively husky*)

This is a true story. It happened in a house a little way out in the country from Wilmington, Delaware.

A SATIRIC VOICE

Wilmington, Delaware? My goodness, how fearful! Delaware!

ANOTHER VOICE

Give the poor thing a chance.

GEORGE

It was just fourteen years ago this winter, and the facts are known by pretty near everybody in Wilmington. If you ask almost anybody from Wilmington about it he'll tell you it's so. Well, this house was an old frame house; it was long and—and—

A VOICE

Rambling. Long and rambling, George.

GEORGE

Yes, it is; it's long and rambling. That is, it was; because after what I'm going to tell you happened to it, why, it had to be torn down. Of course after that nobody would live in it. But fourteen years ago an old man lived there; he lived there all alone. After dark nobody ever saw a light in that house, and—and nobody knew anything about the

THE GHOST STORY

old man except that he used to kill any cat that happened to come in his yard. The neighbors watched one night, and they heard a cat meowing under a bush, and they saw the dim figure of this old man creeping and creeping toward the bush. Then they heard the cat give a kind of terrible scream, and they saw the old man capering around and wringing this cat's neck—just like a chicken's neck! Now, this old man—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*impressed*)

It is fairly creepy.

YOUNG MAN'S VOICE (*also rather impressed*)

Well, go on, George.

GEORGE

This old man never went out in the daytime. No one ever saw just what he looked like, except that he had long, scraggly white hair, and his complexion was a horrible kind of fishy-white color. But night after night the neighbors would see him prowling among the bushes and underbrush in the big weedy yard—and then they'd hear something give a kind of strangling scream, and he'd be wringing something's neck like a chicken, in the dark. And they kept wondering and wondering, and so one night—one night when everybody was asleep and the wind was moaning and the sky was covered with a thunder cloud—

(At this point, while GEORGE talks, the curtain descends for a moment to indicate the lapse of about half an hour, during which GEORGE is telling the greater part of his story. Upon the curtain's rising again he is discovered to be continuing, speaking more dramatically as he warms toward his climax.)

GEORGE

The rapping on the wall was always the same. Three times. Just like this. (*He raps upon the table.*) Three times. Like this. Always just three times. Like this.

A GIRL'S VOICE (*nervously*)

See here! I'm beginning not to like this a little bit!

GEORGE

Listen, will you? Can't you listen?

A YOUTH'S VOICE

We are listening!

A GIRL'S VOICE (*at the same time*)

Go on; we're listening.

ANOTHER VOICE

What's the matter with you?

TWO OTHER VOICES

Why don't you go ahead?

GEORGE

Then listen! On the thirteenth of March, exactly thirteen years after the night the old man was killed, some workmen were making repairs to the plumbing in that rickety old house where he died. Now, these workmen—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*interrupting nervously*)

George, did you say these workmen were plumbers?

GEORGE (*rather crossly*)

Yes, they were.

A YOUTH'S VOICE

Why, they had to be plumbers, didn't they? He said they were doing something to the plumbing. How could they help being plumbers if they were there on account of the plumbing?

ANOTHER VOICE (*impatiently*)

Well, who said they weren't? Go ahead.

GEORGE (*rather annoyed*)

It was an old plumber and a young plumber.

ANOTHER VOICE

Just two of 'em?

GEORGE

Listen! These two plumbers were in the old house all alone—all alone in that empty old house where the murder—

A GIRL'S VOICE (*again interrupting nervously*)

But if there were two of 'em how could either of 'em have been all alone? I don't—

GEORGE (*impatiently*)

Listen, will you? These two men were working at the bathtub where the old man's body—I mean his remains—where his remains had been found thirteen years before, on the thirteenth of March, the same night of the month that they were working there now. The only light these two plumbers had was the light of a lantern, and all the rest of the big old house was pitch dark. Then all at once these two plumbers heard something they thought was a drop of water—just one drop of water that seemed to drip from somewhere. But it had a queer sort of sound, and they didn't like it. "What was that?" the younger one asked the older one. "It sounded like a drop of water falling—from somewhere. I guess it was water," he said. Well, the older one looked around, but he couldn't see anything. "I guess it's probably only a leak in the roof, maybe, and a drop of rain came through." "Well, but how could that be?" the other one said. "There hasn't been any rain for a month." Then, just as they were talking, they heard another drop fall, and they didn't see where it lit. Then another drop fell, and it made a kind of little sizzling sound. "What makes it sound like that?" the younger one wanted to know; but the older one said he couldn't think what did. Then there was another drop—and another—and another—and all at once the old workman said, "Look, here! What makes our light so red?" Well, the young one jumped right up. "By George! I was just noticing that!" he said. "Our light has been getting red!" And so, just that second another drop fell, and made the sort of sizzling sound they'd noticed—and

both of 'em jumped round and looked at the lantern, because the sound came from there. "My goodness!" the younger one said. "Look at that lantern chimney!" The drops were falling on the hot lantern chimney; that's what made the sizzling sound. And what made the light red was the color of the drops that were falling on it. The lantern chimney was all red with what had been falling on it!

A GIRL'S VOICE (*protesting nervously*)
Say!

A YOUTH'S VOICE
Hush up! Go on with the story.

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE
This is just awful. I wish you'd turn up the light.

ANOTHER YOUTH'S VOICE
Go on, George.

GEORGE
Then, just as another drop fell on the lamp chimney, the two plumbers heard a louder sound, and it made the flesh creep on their spines, because it sounded like a long, strangling kind of a wail, and it seemed to come right from the floor—the very floor they were standing on; it came from right under their feet—

ANNA'S VOICE (*protesting*)
I can't stand this! Honestly, I can't!

A YOUTH'S VOICE
Don't be so silly, Anna. You know it's only a story.

ANNA
I don't care! It's too awful. I wish George'd stop!

GEORGE
Listen! "What on earth is that?" one of the plumbers said. "I never heard any such sound as that from a human voice!"

ANNA (*pleading nervously*)
Please stop, George.

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE

And then the red drops on the lantern chimney trickled so fast they got to be almost a little stream, so the red light got dimmer and dimmer, and then, right underneath them, down in the floor, they heard that long, strangling kind of a wail again. "Oo-oo-oo-oo-ow!" it said. "Oo-oo-oo-ow-ow-ow—"

ANNA (*uttering a kind of a wail herself in her extreme nervousness, so that the two sounds mingle*)

Oh-oo-oo-oo—

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE

My goodness! What is that?

A YOUTH'S VOICE (*alarmed*)

See here! Who's doing that?

GEORGE

This wailing went on: "Oo-oo-oo-oo—"

ANNA (*screaming, not loudly, but with convincing sincerity*)

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(*She continues.*)

ANOTHER GIRL'S VOICE (*excitedly*)

What is all this?

A YOUTH'S VOICE

See here! Who is doing that?

(*Others exclaim: "My goodness!" "What's the trouble here?" and "Let's cut this out!" There are sounds of confusion, chairs are overturned, ANNA continues to vociferate, "Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!"*)

GEORGE (*determined to reach his climax, and making himself heard in spite of everything*)

"I'll find out who's doing this wailing," the old plumber said. "It sounds to me like a cat!" And he took his ax and struck right into the floor. That brought the most awful scream—

(*It brings subdued screams also from ANNA and LENNIE. Every one talks at once.*)

FLOYD (*commandingly*)

Stop it, George! Turn up that light! Anna's got hysterics!

GEORGE (*shouting*)

I got to finish my story, haven't I?

ANOTHER VOICE

Turn up some lights, will you?

(A key button is pressed and the stage is alight, revealing a confused group, with the girls gathered anxiously about ANNA. She is in a chair near the center and continues to be rather vociferously agitated.)

ANNA

Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

(She goes on.)

GRACE

Where's some ammonia! Who's got any ammonia?

FRED (*rushing in from another room with a glass of water*)

Here! Dab this on her face!

LENNIE

Rub her hands! Rub her, Floyd!

(They dab water upon her face with handkerchiefs, while FLOYD and LYNN obediently rub her hands.)

ANNA (*protesting, but continuing to be hysterical*)

Don't! Don't splatter me! How could he do it with an ax, George? What do you mean, an ax—

GEORGE

I said—

ANNA (*wildly*)

You said the plumber hit the floor with an ax! Where would a plumber get an ax? Plumbers don't have axes!

GEORGE

Well, this one did!

THE GHOST STORY

ANNA

Then he couldn't have been a plumber! (MARY *presses a wet handkerchief upon her lips*; ANNA *struggles*.)
Stop it, Mary! Don't put that handkerchief in my mouth!

MARY

Yes, dear; it'll do you good.

ANNA

It won't! Let go my hands!

GRACE

No. Keep on rubbing 'em!
(*They do.*)

ANNA

I never saw a plumber with an ax. Oh! Oh! Oh!

LENNIE (*sternly*)

Hush! Hush! You must hush!

ANNA

Oh! Oh! Oh!

MARY

We'd better call her mother.

ANNA (*sharply*)

Don't you dare!

GRACE

Well, what are we going to do about her?

ANNA

I'll be all right. Just let me alone. Oh! Oh! Oh!

GEORGE

That's it. We ought to let her alone. We ought to go home and give her a chance to quiet down. She never will if we all stay here and keep her excited like this.

LENNIE

Well, some of us ought to stay. The rest of you go, and I'll stay with her.

GEORGE

No. You go with the rest, and I'll stay till she gets quiet.

LENNIE

You? Why, you're the one that gave her hysterics!

GEORGE (*earnestly*)

Then I ought to be the one to cure her.

ANNA

I'm—Oh! Oh! I'll be all right if you'll just leave me to myself.

MARY (*nervously*)

Let's do go! This room gives me the creeps after—

CHORUS

Let's go! Anna wants us to. We'd better let her alone a while. She says so herself. Come on!

GEORGE

I'll stay and—

LENNIE and MARY and GRACE

No, you won't!

GEORGE

But I—

LENNIE

Why, the very sight of your face'd make her worse! You march out of here!

CHORUS (*moving toward the hall door and carrying GEORGE with them*)

You'll be all right pretty soon, Anna. We'd better do as she says. She'll be all right.

MARY (*returning to ANNA*)

You're sure you don't want—

ANNA

No, no, no! I'll be all right just as soon as I can be a little quiet by myself. I really will. Good night, dear!

THE GHOST STORY

CHORUS

Good night! Good night, Anna! See you to-morrow, Anna! It's a shame George didn't have more sense! George never did have a grain of intelligence! Good night! Good night!

GEORGE (*turning back*)

Anna, I'll—

MARY and LENNIE

No, you won't. Let her alone.

(They seize his arms and propel him out into the hall. The door is closed, leaving ANNA alone. It is immediately opened again by GEORGE, returning.)

GEORGE

Anna, I want to say—

(LENNIE, GRACE, MARY, FRED, TOM, FLOYD, and LYNN, instantly seize him and carry him back into the hall.)

CHORUS

You come back here! Haven't you got any sense? George, you ought to be hanged! Bring him along, the idiot!

(They again close the door, and for some moments, as they put on their outer wraps, the sound of their voices in extremely unfavorable comment upon GEORGE continues to be heard. Then the talk grows fainter as they move away in the hall. The outer door is heard to close, and there is silence. ANNA at once rises calmly, her agitation entirely vanished. She goes to the hall door, looks out, then closes the door and goes thoughtfully to the fire. She seems to wait. Then, as though abandoning an idea, she shrugs her shoulders.)

ANNA

Oh, well!

(Humming a tune, she goes to the piano. But she does not sit. Standing, she touches a chord thoughtfully; then shrugs her shoulders again, goes to a table, picks up the

leather-bound book she had pretended to read at the opening of the play and, sighing, walks gloomily to the door and opens it, about to leave the room. However, she pauses, listening. A sound has reached her ears from a window across the room. The curtains are drawn, but there is a tapping upon the window pane. The taps come in sets of three, well defined. She smiles suddenly, a very bright smile.)

ANNA

Oh, it's a ghost. (*She becomes serious and returns into the room.*) Is it the ghost of the old cat murderer? (*The tappings continue steadily. She goes to the window, pulls back the curtains, and reveals a frosty glass, behind which is a masculine figure. She interrogates it.*) Is it the ghost?

(*The tappings become more emphatic; she opens the window, and GEORGE is seen, light snow on his hat and shoulders.*)

GEORGE (*huskily*)

Anna—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

Are you better?

ANNA

Yes, George.

GEORGE

I sneaked away from 'em. I thought it might be best to keep away from the front door if any of 'em were looking. Besides, I was afraid they might follow me back. Can I come in?

ANNA

Yes, George.

(*He shakes off the snow and climbs in.*)

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE

Why, you look all right. Are you?

ANNA (*gently*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

I just had to tell you; I never dreamed of frightening you. I thought—well, what I thought was maybe I could make that story so awful they'd get scared and go home. But I see I was wrong; the more scared they'd get, why, the less they'd want to leave. I was doing exactly the wrong thing to make 'em go!

ANNA (*smiling*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

And the only one I really frightened was you! That is, unless—unless—well, I wondered— You see, I know the tones of your voice pretty well—and—and—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I wondered—Anna, did you pretend to be scared hysterical?

ANNA (*laughing faintly*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE

And that's why they went! Anna, did you want 'em to go?

ANNA (*looking away*)

Yes, George.

GEORGE (*looking at his watch and the clock*)

I've only got—Anna, I've only got about (*he swallows*) well, it's a pretty short time. Can I—

ANNA

Yes, George.

(She sits.)

GEORGE *(taking off his overcoat)*

Thanks! *(He puts the coat and his hat on a chair.)*

Anna, I—well, there's something I wanted to say to you. I've wanted to say it ever since the day you wore a blue dress. This thing I want to say to you—well, I'm afraid you'll be surprised when I tell you what it is—

ANNA *(biting her lip)*

Yes, George?

GEORGE *(with increasing nervousness)*

Yes, I'm afraid you will. And I'm—well, I'm terribly afraid you—I'm afraid you won't like it. Of course I—I know I'm not worthy to say it to you, and if you don't like it—and I'm almost sure you won't—well, if you don't, I—*(he swallows again)*—I'll just have to stand it somehow, I guess! Well *(he looks at the clock)*—I've hardly got time to say it—

ANNA *(frowning)*

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I don't know what you'll say!

ANNA

Yes, George?

(His attention seems to be caught uneasily.)

GEORGE

Anna, what's the matter? You just say the same thing over and over.

ANNA

Yes, George.

THE GHOST STORY

GEORGE (*bewildered*)

I don't understand. You see I came here to-night—to—to—to say to you that I—to ask you—to ask you—

ANNA

Yes, George?

GEORGE

I—I—I told you about what my father said to me—how I'd have a share in the business after commencement. So I felt justified in—in—in—

ANNA (*with some emphasis*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE

And so I—I—I want to ask you—to ask—to ask you—

ANNA (*whispering it shyly*)

Yes, George?

GEORGE (*swallowing*)

To ask you—could you—could you—Anna, could you, could you— (*He approaches her, his voice growing louder in his nervousness.*) Anna, could you, could you—could you—

(*At this instant the heads of LENNIE, MARY, GRACE, FLOYD, TOM, LYNN, and FRED, who have been crouching outside below the sill, suddenly appear in the window.*)

LENNIE, MARY, GRACE, FLOYD, TOM, LYNN, and FRED (*all together*)

Yes, George!

(*ANNA rushes upon the window, closes it, and pulls the curtains across it.*)

GEORGE (*astounded*)

Why, what do they mean? They don't mean I—they don't mean you—

(*ANNA forms the words "Yes, George" with her lips, then looks shyly down.*)

GEORGE

Oh! (*He swallows.*) Oh!

(*His expression, which has been one of great anxiety, alters to a widening smile as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

(4)

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